



# SPIDER-MAN TURNS 60!

WE CELEBRATE  
SIX DECADES OF  
WEB-SLINGING

357

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS

MEET THE RINGS  
OF POWER CAST

## QUANTUM LEAP

OH BOY! BECKETT  
REBOOTED

## SEASON 2 EXCLUSIVE!

# CHUCKY!

The killer doll  
takes it to church

FATE: THE  
WINX SAGA  
RETURN TO MAGIC  
SCHOOL!

HOCUS  
POCUS 2  
THEY'RE BACK,  
WITCHES!

**PLUS!** CRIMES OF THE FUTURE | AFTER YANG | STAR WARS: ANDOR | STAR TREK | HOUSE OF THE DRAGON  
DON'T WORRY DARLING | CREEPSHOW | AVENGERS CAMPUS | FANTASTIC FOUR | SMILE | SCARLET SISTERS





B B C

# DOCTOR WHO



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for details

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GET IN TOUCH!

# First Contact

## Hailing Frequencies Open!



Were we wrong about "The Elysian Kingdom"?

© PARAMOUNT



### KINGDOM COME GOOD

**Richard Unwin, email** In an otherwise positive write-up of *Strange New Worlds* in SFX 356, Will Salmon refers to "sword and sorcery" episode "The Elysian Kingdom" as "the one lousy installment". What rot – it was one of the highlights of the season! And I would venture that it actually has more in common with the classic series episode "Shore Leave" than it does with any of the *TNG* holodeck episodes, as Salmon suggests.

### GONE 'GIRL

**Lior Blum, email** So Warner has put the kibosh on *Batgirl*? Call me cynical but I believe this is the best advertising strategy since Mary Whitehouse demonised the video nasty. In the next few months there'll be fan petitions by the bucketload, generating the kind of anticipation normally associated with \$80 million marketing campaigns. Intended or not, bravo, Warner, bravo.

**SFX: Holy stealth publicity campaigns! This can only be the work of that foul fiend the Hypester...**

### A PAIR OF DUFFERS

**Rob McRob, email** I see that the Duffer Brothers are set to adapt what is, for this long time Stephen King fan, one of his finest works, *The Talisman*. Whilst the brothers might seem a natural fit, one can't help but wonder about the pitfalls.

Mr King does much of the work for anyone thinking of adapting because his prose describes how the characters look, their speech patterns, character traits and so on. For an example of how not to adapt any work by any author they should watch *Doctor Sleep*. I'm hoping for something akin to *Misery* and not that misstep...

**SFX: Just lock the Duffers in a guest bedroom in a remote house in Colorado. They'll soon get it right.**



**On The Flash ending after season nine: About time. It's a shadow of its former self from the earliest seasons.**

**David Cutler**



**On the scrapping of a Crisis On Infinite Earths movie: To be fair, crisis on one Earth is probably enough for people at the moment.**

**@MikeHollows**

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# SFX

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"I just had problems with the back end"



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## Rants & Raves

Inside the **SFX** hive mind

**DARREN SCOTT** EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Spooky season has officially begun! I've already been searching shops for horror decorations. On that note – it's great to have *American Horror Stories* back again.  
→ Parker Posey was, as usual, brilliant in *Tales Of The Walking Dead*. More please!

### RANTS

→ The new *Thor* movie was “not for me”.

**IAN BERRIMAN** DEPUTY EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Delighted *The Lazarus Project* is getting a second season, meaning I can continue to enjoy spotting bits of Bristol pretending to be Paris.  
→ Looking forward to the first Hartnell *Doctor Who: The Collection* box set. “The Chase” in HD! Truly we live in a golden age.  
→ Those of you who went to Frightfest may have seen it by now, but I'm still keenly anticipating Jean Rollin documentary *The Orchestrator Of Storms*.

**JONATHAN COATES** ART EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Three fun facts I learned from Disney's excellent *Light & Magic* history of ILM series: 1) VFX visionary Richard Edlund designed the famous *Star Trek* typeface. 2) Dennis Muren insists that Morphing should really be spelt “Morfin”. 3) The Donald Genarro character who's snatched from a toilet in the first *Jurassic Park* movie is actually the T-1000 digital model from *Terminator 2*. Does that count as a Robert Patrick cameo?

### RANTS

→ Beginning to find the MCU's self-referential dialogue a bit wearing... it somehow feels more endearing in the comics.

**ED RICKETTS** PRODUCTION EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Excited to read Ramsey Campbell's new book *Fellstones*. He's the best living British psychological horror writer. Yeah, I said it.  
→ Recently reinstalled notoriously complicated PC space sim *Eve Online* and found a character I'd made in 2008, no less. Back to the grind!

**NICK SETCHFIELD** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

### RAVES

→ Wonderful to catch the Director's Edition of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* on the big screen. It's a film that I've always championed and those visuals – and that story – deserve the scale of a cinema viewing. Don't mind admitting the Enterprise flyby left me a little wobbly...  
→ Loved *Light & Magic*. All those hippie wizards building the future of movies!

**TARA BENNETT** US EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Disney+ *Star Wars* has been underwhelming so far but *Andor* finally hits all the right creative buttons, led by Diego Luna's fascinating, complicated character. New places, faces and unexpected stories.  
→ Didn't expect to immediately get into *The Lord Of The Rings: Rings Of Power*. Gorgeous visuals but characters worth investing in too.



## Captain's Log



Being a fan of horror, I've always loved the *Child's Play* movies. But the *Chucky* series? Now that I *really* loved. Sure, I was expecting to enjoy it, I knew it would be good. But I hadn't considered that it would be *brilliant*. If you haven't seen it, then you get to binge the entire first season – lucky you, I had to wait week by week – in time for the demon doll's return next month. Season two promises to take things to a whole new level, as well as to reintroduce fan favourites.

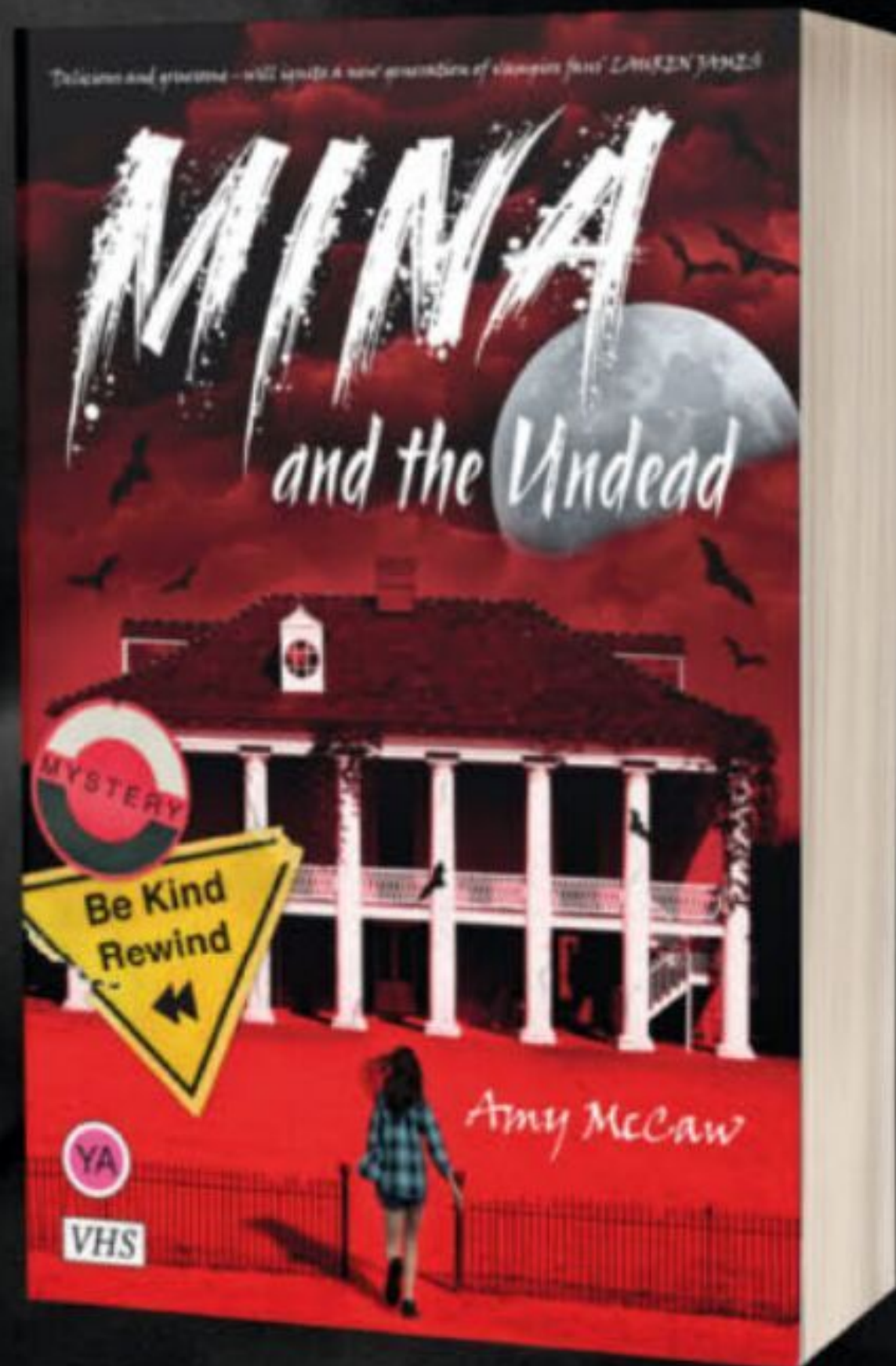
It's always a pleasure to chat with creator Don Mancini, and I'm delighted to have his horrific offspring bursting from the cover of this issue. On another spooky, yet not *quite* so horrific, vibe – something I've waited nearly 30 years for is almost finally here... I could barely contain my joy when talking to the director and producer of *Hocus Pocus 2*. You see, I still genuinely get excited when waking up to be part of the team that puts *SFX* together every four weeks.

It's no secret that “spooky season” is my favourite time of year, so consider this issue something of a starter before the main course next month – our annual Halloween Horror special. Speaking of next issue, don't fret, *Doctor Who* fans – you can expect to see coverage on the Centenary Special in those pages!

Darren  
X



New Orleans, 1995. First Mina had a summer to die for,  
and now she's having a killer Halloween.



*'Buffy meets Scream with a touch of  
I Know What You Did Last Summer.'*  
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travel through the gothic atmosphere  
of vampire-loving 90s New Orleans.'*  
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# *THE FUTURE FIRST!* Red Alert

→ NEWS /// INTERVIEWS /// INSIGHT /// HOLOGRAMS!

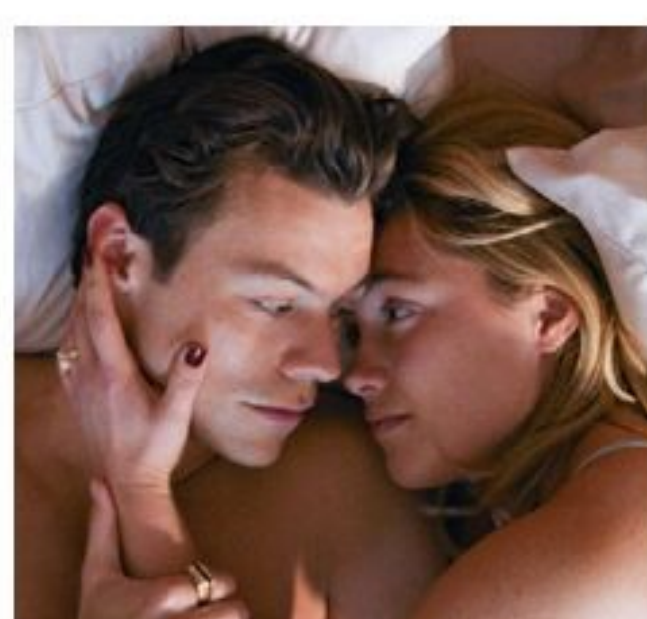
OCTOBER  
2022

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## ROGUE ELEMENTS

Diego Luna and Genevieve O'Reilly  
talk all things *Andor*

### Highlights



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#### DON'T WORRY DARLING

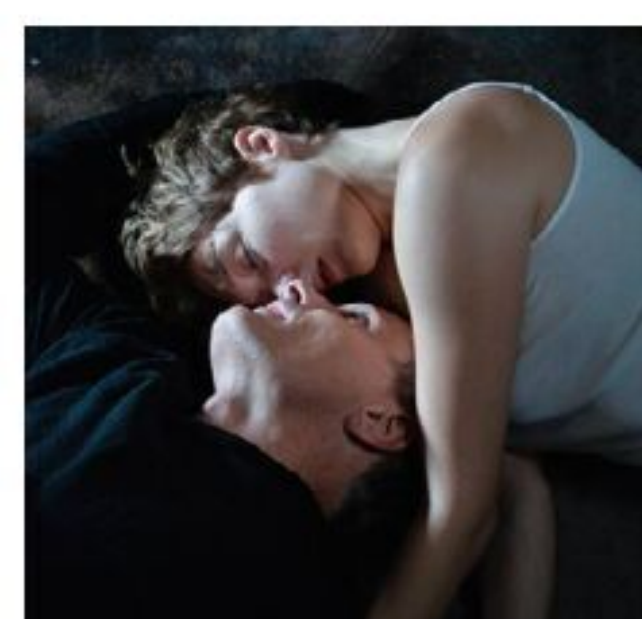
→ Harry Styles and Florence Pugh are living in a '50s utopia. Or are they?



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#### SMILE

→ Is the answer to life's problems to just grin and bear it? Definitely not in this debut horror flick.



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#### CRIMES OF THE FUTURE

→ David Cronenberg returns to sci-fi and horror for the first time in over 20 years.



WRITER/PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

# Utopian Dreams

Writer Katie Silberman teases the unexpected in **Don't Worry Darling**

➔ GENRE STORYTELLING LOVES TO play with the idea of utopian societies created to provide the utmost security, comfort and sometimes even luxury – but at a cost. From *Brave New World* to *Logan's Run*, there are countless explorations in text and cinema – with a myriad of creative tweaks – that provoke our selfish impulses as well as our moral compasses. But not many are told from the perspective of a woman being tempted.

Director Olivia Wilde and screenwriter Katie Silberman aim to give the female gaze its due with their genre-blending thriller *Don't Worry Darling*. Set in 1950s Palm Springs, it presents Alice (Florence Pugh) and Jack Chambers (Harry Styles) as the newest residents of the insular, gated company town of Victory.

Created by Frank (Chris Pine) for his white-collar employees, this slice of heaven provides the families within everything they need in exchange for their compliance. However, Alice is curious about what exactly Frank is making in Victory and starts questioning what they're not allowed to see.

## STEPFORD LIVES

Constructed to hide its narrative secrets well, Katie Silberman's latest collaboration with Wilde is, she tells Red Alert, based on an original idea by screenwriters Carey and Shane Van Dyck, that they then reworked for a female perspective. "I can say, as a woman, I'm sometimes surprised at the way that I have to explain to people moments that they wouldn't have considered the same way that I would," she says of how perspective alone can sometimes fundamentally reshape a story.

"We also wanted to examine the grey area that we felt stories like these hadn't [gone into] as deeply as we wanted. And we were really excited to be able to dive into a world of characters that are living the life of their dreams, and then pull back to examine what

people are willing to give up to live the life of their dreams."

The marketing has been intentionally vague leading up to *Don't Worry Darling*'s theatrical release, with some seeing a bit of a *Stepford Wives* vibe to the women of Victory. Silberman says she gets that assumption, but asserts that she and Wilde have made something distinctly outside of that mould.

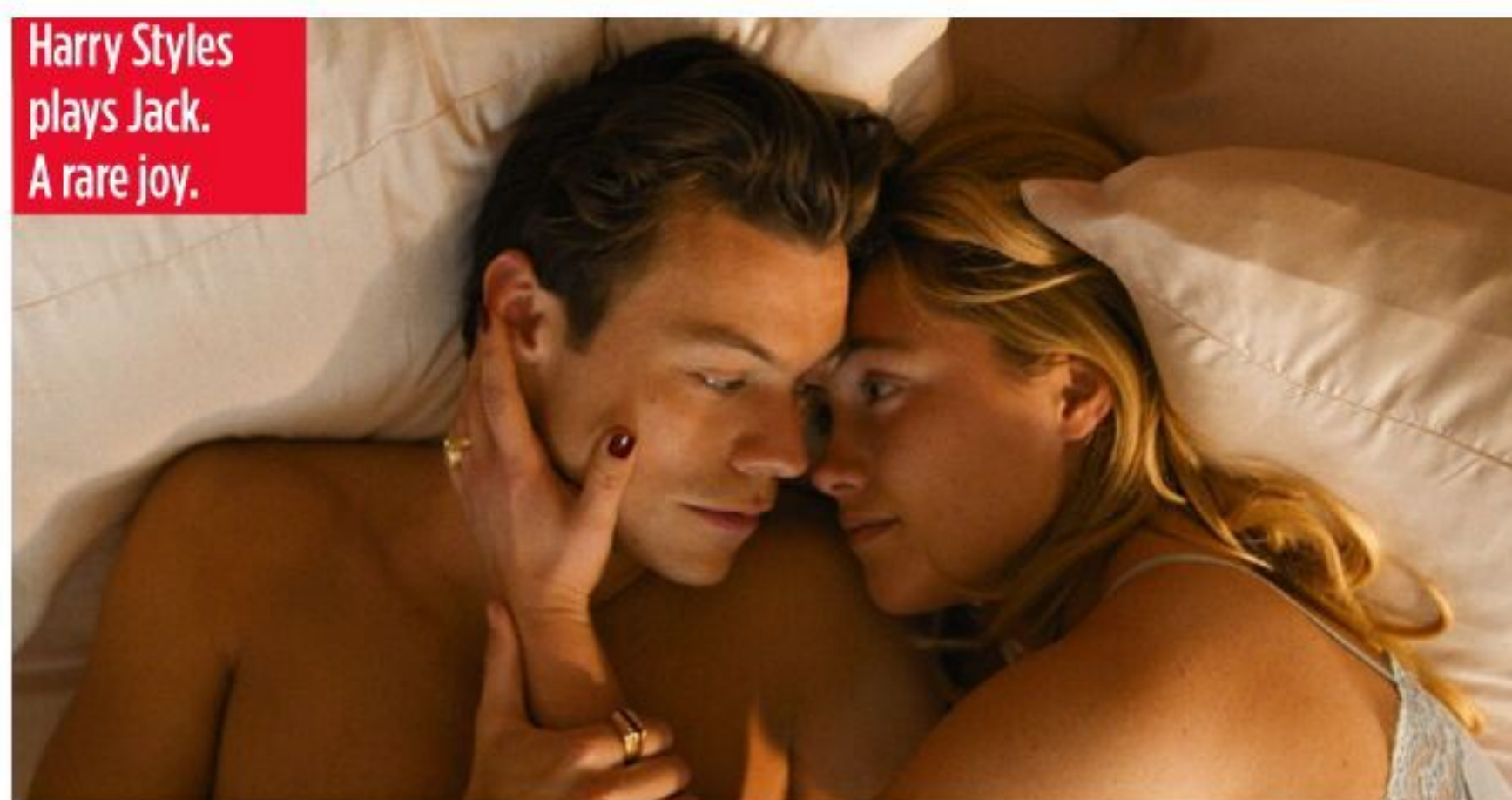
"We wanted to show that these were real people who were vibrant and had hungers and passion and fun, which is not something that I think you always see when people think about this time period. It's not necessarily the '50s that you think you know," she teases.

It's through Alice's eyes that the audience experiences Victory, and Silberman says she provides the "slight tilt of focus that opens up a whole new world, where maybe you think you know what's going on, but you don't." As they crafted the script around Alice, she says they learned that the audience can weather a

Alice (Florence Pugh) grapples with the idea of an egg.



Harry Styles plays Jack. A rare joy.



Chris Pine as the enigmatic Frank.







Silberman also praises the entire cast for their part in selling the allure of this place, from Harry Styles and Gemma Chan to Chris Pine, whose Frank is seemingly controlling the proverbial strings of the whole town. “I had an amazing time collaborating with him on the role of Frank,” she enthuses. “Even the little things in the way Frank would speak or approach someone, he had a really distinct and wonderful idea of who this person was.”

“And so that role really became a chemical equation of the Frank that we had written, and how we were able to mould him and his ideas into it. He’s so good at so many things that it’s incredibly disarming. And that unpredictability is something that works with comedies and thrillers. It’s something that we were able to bring in, because you’re trying to keep people off-balance.”

Hoping to appeal to those hungry for the unexpected and a story different from the normal blockbuster fare, Silberman says she hopes audiences find *Don’t Worry Darling* to be one of those movies that has people excitedly talking about it afterwards in the cinema car park.

“I think it’s thrilling and sexy and beautiful,” she enthuses. “I’m excited for people to see it and to be able to have those conversations afterwards. And to see something I don’t think they’ve ever seen before.” **TB**

*Don’t Worry Darling* is in cinemas from 23 September.

“We wanted to show that these were real people who were vibrant and had hungers”

multitude of reveals if their heroine is compelling enough.

“We knew that the whole movie lived and died on us caring about, and loving, Alice,” she says. “So we were beyond lucky to have Florence in that role, because she’s so vibrant. She’s just so charming and lovely and vivacious, but also really smart and really tough and brave.”

“We knew the role was going to require all those things, which is hard to find in one person, and she has them. The performance she gives is beyond a writer’s wildest dreams.”

Director Olivia Wilde and Chris Pine sort it all out.



**SCI-FACT!** Olivia Wilde namechecks genre classics such as *Inception*, *The Matrix* and *The Truman Show* as inspirations.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

# Creeping Into Comics

Greg Nicotero on taking **Creepshow** from the small screen to the page

WHILE THE GREG NICOTERO-produced series is returning for its fourth season on television next year, *Creepshow* will first be the subject of a print miniseries from Skybound Entertainment. “There’s something fun about translating *Creepshow* into comic book form because of the fact that details generally revolve around some sort of morality, with that captivating, visually stunning final frame on the twist,” Nicotero tells Red Alert. “It was always something I looked for when I was younger, reading comics and wanting to flip to the last page to see the turn. *Creepshow* is perfectly suited for that, based on its roots and its DNA.”

The five-parter taps into the debt George Romero and Stephen King’s original 1982 anthology movie owes to notorious EC Comics like *Tales From The Crypt* and *The Vault Of Horror*. “So much of what inspired Stephen King were the comics of the ’50s that were so subversive by nature at that time that it inspired and intrigued future writers, directors and filmmakers,” explains Nicotero.

“*Creepshow* continued the tradition, as King and Romero paid tribute to an art form and genre that is often misunderstood and maligned but provides us with one of the greatest escapes we can hope for.”

While Nicotero has long acted as special effects supervisor on *The Walking Dead* and its various offshoots, he maintains that *Creepshow* takes place in a very different world to Skybound founder Robert Kirkman’s zombie drama. “*The Walking Dead* has always been unique because of its ensemble storytelling and gritty post-apocalyptic quality, whereas *Creepshow* always takes itself a little less seriously,” he says.

“The tongue-in-cheek manner with which the stories are told – sometimes funny,

The editor of *SFX* checks out the latest issue.

sometimes outrageous, always entertaining – is intended to be served up in small bite-size bits, as opposed to one long narrative.”

The comic’s contributors range from TV scriptwriters like Paul Dini and Stephen Langford to comics veterans such as Kelley Jones, Steve Foxe and David and Maria Lapham. “Developing the stories for the comic book was very different to developing the stories for the series,” explains Nicotero. “It was important to maintain some continuity, so

having Stephen and Paul was really important, but I was also excited to tap into some talent that hadn’t written for the show. I love the fact that every story is different in the *Creepshow* world, and having the opportunity to see the perspectives of different writers and artists.”

“This is the first comic script I’ve been involved in,” continues Langford, who has co-written “Shingo” with Paul Dini, for artist John McCrea. “It’s wild seeing a story we’ve spun become a new kind of reality, and it’s amazing seeing our character join *Creepshow*.”

“It’s a big deal for me to be working with Stephen and Paul, as I love *Creepshow*,” adds McCrea. Writing and drawing a terrifying tale for *Creepshow* issue one also meant “the absolute world” to Chris Burnham.

“My story is slightly autobiographical, filled with adolescent anxiety, pretty funny, scary and gross,” he further teases. “It also has a snappy ending, so it’s *Creepshow* through and through!” **SJ**

*Creepshow* issue one is out on 21 September.





WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Galaxy's Finest

After IDW's milestone 400th issue, Starfleet's heroes are assembling for a brand new **Star Trek** series

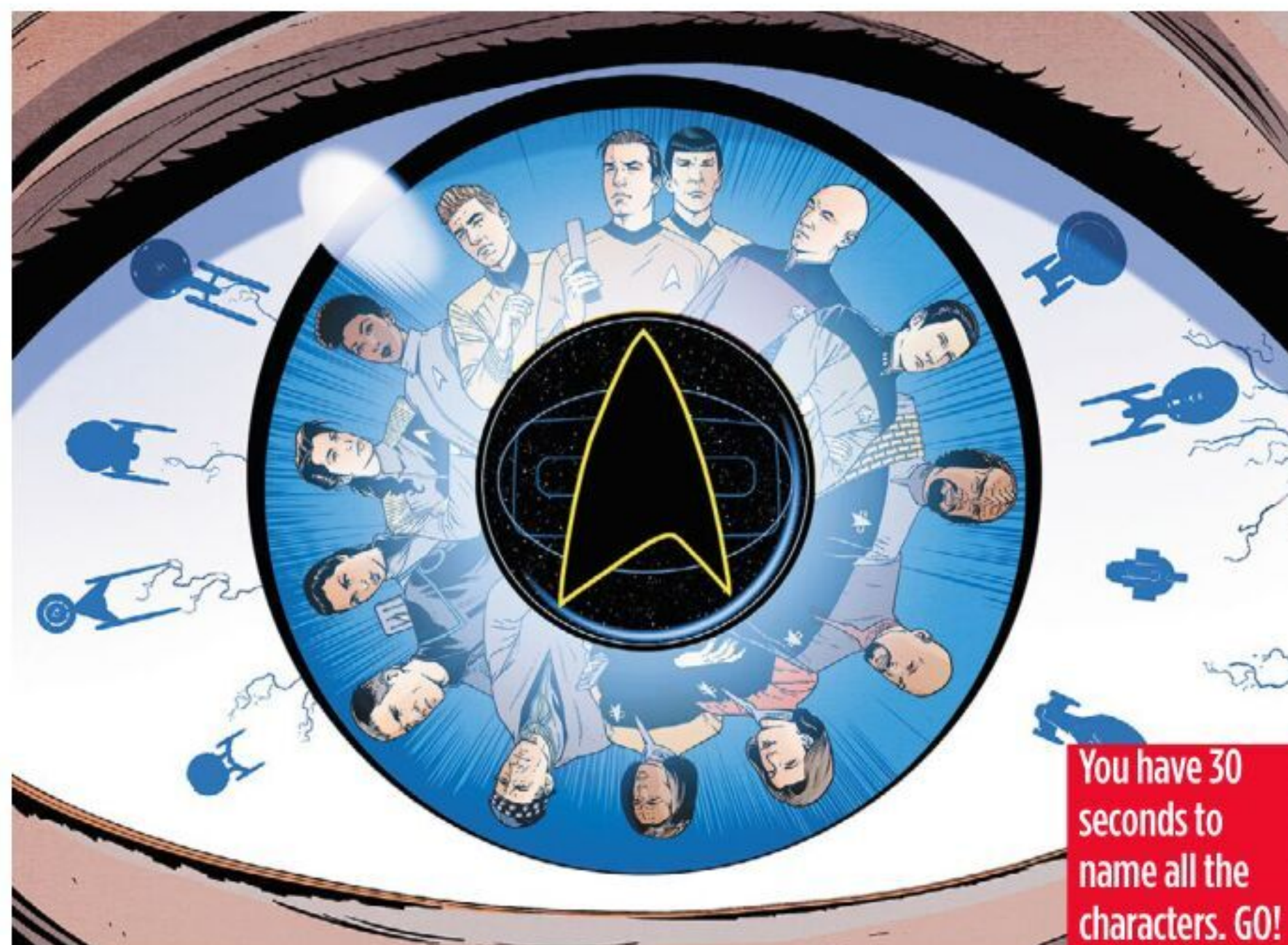
WITH EDITOR HEATHER ANTOS affirming that "my goal from the beginning was to celebrate *Star Trek's* past, present and future in the best way comics know how," IDW marks its 400th *Star Trek* issue this month with an oversized special, featuring contributions from creators such as Mike Johnson, Declan Shalvey and Wil "Wesley Crusher" Wheaton, who will "pen his character's never-before-seen future."

While Antos emphasises that "as we all know, *Star Trek* is all about exploration – going boldly where no one had gone before," the 64-pager also sets the scene for October's *Star Trek* issue one. Written by *Star Trek: Year Five's* Collin Kelly with Jackson Lanzing, and drawn by Ramon Rosanas, the new monthly boasts a roll call of characters drawn from the entire 56-year canon of Gene Roddenberry's beloved TV series.

"*Star Trek* 400 is going to be an utter celebration of all things *Trek*, but to then launch a new *Star Trek* – and to be able to call it *Star Trek* – is an experience that is still hard to put into words," admits Kelly. "The *Star Trek* issue 400 story is in many ways *Star Trek* issue 0, and there's an inciting incident for the audience as you're reintroduced to one of *Star Trek's* very first characters – and its very first space god – Gary Mitchell. You'll find out what he's been up to, where he's going, and what's coming up for him."

Based on the experimental USS *Theseus* – as previously seen in *Star Trek: Year Five* – the book's roster is headed up by *Deep Space Nine's* Benjamin Sisko, and also includes Data, Beverly Crusher and "everyone's favourite Delta Flyer-flying hotshot", Tom Paris from *Voyager*, who according to Kelly "brings some levity, but also the skill to keep our crew alive." We'll have to

wait to see who fills the tactical and engineering positions, though. "You'll see new familiar faces in nearly every issue, as well as new worlds and civilisations," promises Lanzing. "We'll be taking you to the edge of the galaxy and into the most familiar of captains' quarters. This book really does encompass all of *Star Trek*, and we intend to make the most out of the opportunity to ensure fans get a universe-wide story like none other."



"It was a case of we have a universe of players, so why not throw them together like any other cinematic universe and create an 'Avengers of *Star Trek*', as it were," adds Lanzing, who insists that no multiversal, timey-wimey shenanigans are involved. "Our book exists fundamentally in the Prime Timeline and is set irrevocably in the year 2398. We're not time-travelling or popping through dimensions to recruit characters. "We picked this time period because most of our favourite characters were either alive, in service, or at the end of their journeys, so we could pick this up by bringing everyone together to chart a new course forward."

"There's also a huge secret no one knows," teases Kelly. "Stay tuned, it's a doozy!" **SJ**

*Star Trek 400 is out now. Star Trek 1 is out on 26 October.*



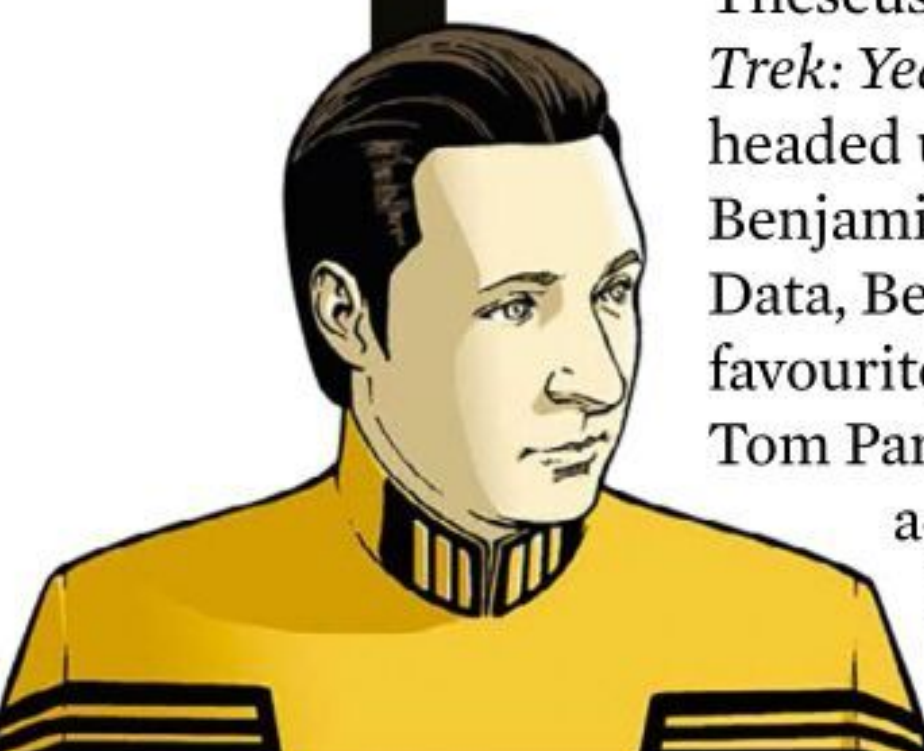
## NEWS WARP

### HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ **The Flash** officially running out of track: 2023's ninth season will be the last.  
→ Netflix renewing animated anthology **Love, Death + Robots** for a fourth season.  
→ Matt Frewer returning as '80s AI icon **Max Headroom** in new reboot.  
→ Krysten Ritter starring in franchise extension **Orphan Black: Echoes**.  
→ Idris Elba takes on an apocalyptic cult in Dark Horse Comics adaptation **Bang!**.  
→ Disney+ developing a live-action **Eragon** series, based on the books by Christopher Paolini.  
→ Prequel show **Outlander: Blood Of My Blood** set to focus on Jamie's parents.  
→ Joe Barton's **The Lazarus Project** renewed for a second season by Sky.  
→ Kurt and Wyatt Russell joining Apple TV+'s **Godzilla** spin-off.  
→ Michelle Yeoh, Chris Pratt and Millie Bobby Brown starring in retro-futurist Western **The Electric State** for Russo Bros.  
→ **For All Mankind** renewed for fourth season on Apple TV+.



DAVID LIVINGSTON/STRINGER/GETTY



► **SCI-FACT!** *Star Trek 400* also includes a recap of IDW's *Star Trek* series by comics historian Rich Handley.



DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Happiness Will Prevail

Writer/director Finn Parker talks about new horror movie **Smile**



IN 2020, PARKER FINN DEBUTED HIS SECOND short, “Laura Hasn’t Slept”, about a young woman who seeks the help of a therapist after suffering a series of nightmares. Not only did it scoop the Special Jury Recognition Prize at the South By Southwest film festival, but the word got out that this was something special. “It just started spreading around town like wildfire,” Finn tells Red Alert. “And then people started reaching out...”

*Smile* is not only Parker Finn’s first studio film, but his first ever feature, such was Paramount’s trust in this promising up-and-comer. And while *Smile* isn’t exactly a big-budget, full-length remake of “Laura Hasn’t Slept”, it’s certainly a riff on it.

“While I’d been in post[-production] I’d had this idea for a much bigger movie, one that used the short film as a springboard,” he reveals. “There are threads of DNA from ‘Laura Hasn’t Slept’ running through *Smile*.”

Anyone who’s seen the trailer for *Smile* will already know how soul-freezing scary it looks. A doctor is haunted by visions of smiling people, but not the kind that puts a spring in your step or that Katy Perry or Justin Bieber ever sang about.

Kyle Gallner  
(*Scream 2022*)  
also stars, as  
Joel.

“I chose to use the smile to represent the evil in the film, because I think there’s a real strength in the inherent contradiction of it,” Finn explains. “A smile is a gesture of warmth and kindness and friendliness. It’s something that’s really primal – we learn to smile as babies before we even learn to speak. I wanted to see if I could flip that on its head and allow the evil in the film to use a smile as a mask.”





He may not be smiling, but he's at least beaming.



Sosie Bacon as Rose Cotter: not much to smile about.

## “What I loved about *The Shining* was the feeling of going mad with Jack”

A lifelong movie nut and horror fan (“My dad was a big cinephile and I was consuming movies constantly as a kid”), Finn says that Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* and Hideo Nakata’s *Ring* were among the inspirations for his film. “What I loved about *The Shining* was the feeling of going mad with Jack Torrance, and I wanted to see if I could instil that in *Smile*,” he says. “And I love the nightmarish quality of *Ring* and the investigative angle.

“There’s also a film called *Safe* by Todd Haynes which is one of my favourite movies. What I love about it is how intensely it puts you in the subjective [point of view] of Julianne Moore’s character as she’s dealing with all this anxiety in her life as it’s spiralling out of control. That film was definitely on my mind in a big way.”

*Smile*’s own Julianne Moore is Sosie Bacon, who, as Dr Rose Cotter, appears in virtually every scene. Despite being the daughter of A-list parents (Sosie’s father is Kevin Bacon and her mother is Kyra Sedgwick), this is the actor’s first headlining role. And Finn couldn’t be happier with his leading lady.

“I knew from the very beginning that the film would totally hinge on the performance of Rose,” the director says. “Sosie is an amazing actress and incredibly emotionally intuitive. She has this ability to draw you in as a real, grounded human character who is going through these really extraordinary things. I think that she’s given one of the most incredible debut performances in recent years, and I can’t wait for people to see it.”

Although this is Finn’s first feature-length movie as writer-director, he says that it didn’t differ too much from his experience making shorts, despite the more generous budget and longer time frame.

“While you’re in production,” he says, “you’re just trying to put one foot in front of the other, and you hope that the plan that you’ve built is going to come to fruition, because you’re always up against it with time and money.

“Whatever the world is throwing at you, whether it’s weather or noisy neighbours or whatever, you’re trying to stick to that north star that you’ve created for yourself. Production’s always an incredibly mad dash. I mean, we were a studio movie, but we also had a modest budget, so it almost felt like an independent film.”

As for what’s next on the agenda, Finn says he’s keen to play some more in the horror sandpit. “I love genre filmmaking,” he beams. “Horror is one of my absolute first loves and I would love to continue telling stories that are horror, or horror-adjacent.

“I always want to be able to explore the human condition, and I love the ways that the genre allows you to do that in really unexpected methods. So yeah, my goal is to continue telling things that have a real sense of human emotion and fright built into them.” **so**

*Smile is in cinemas from 30 September.*



## NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Batfleck returns! Ben’s back as Bruce Wayne in 2023’s **Aquaman And The Lost Kingdom**.  
→ Stephen King novel **The Regulators** heading to the big screen.  
→ Pellet-gobbling arcade classic **Pac-Man** in line for movie adaptation... somehow.  
→ **Sonic The Hedgehog 3** out 20 December 2024.  
→ *Godzilla Vs Kong* sequel going by working title **Origins**.  
→ Gagatastic sequel **Joker: Folie à Deux** set for 4 October 2024 release.  
→ *The Black Phone* team producing **Room 428**, written and directed by Brett and Drew Pierce.  
→ French master criminal **Fantomas** returning to the screen 109 years after his cinema debut. Still looking good, Monsieur F!  
→ *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s Ann Dowd joining the Blumhouse **Exorcist** sequel.  
→ Seth Rogen’s CG-animated reboot **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem** targeting 4 August 2023 release.  
→ Carla Gugino joining ‘80s-set horror-comedy **Lisa Frankenstein**, scripted by *Juno*’s Diablo Cody.



► **SCI-FACT!** Parker Finn’s first short was “The Hidebehind”, a 19th century folk-horror about a monster.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Blood Ties

Forties heroes Masquerade, Lady Satan and the Woman In Red are **Scarlet Sisters**

➔ MASQUERADE, LADY Satan and the Woman In Red are teaming up as the Scarlet Sisters in a special one-shot from writer Alex Segura and artist Emiliana Pinna, part of the Project Superpowers line. Originally appearing in early '40s titles by now-defunct publishers like Nedor Comics and Harry A Chester's *Dynamic Comics*, the trio had languished in the public domain before being resurrected by Dynamite Entertainment, among others.

"[Dynamite editor] Nate Cosby asked if I'd have any interest in doing some Project Superpowers, so we went over a list of options and landed on *Scarlet Sisters*," recalls Segura. "I liked the idea of three strong characters, each marked by their own tragedies, coming together to do some good – and in the process getting over their own traumas."

With the Woman In Red and Masquerade – or Ms Masque as she was first known – both appearing as members of the super-team SMASH in Alan Moore and Chris Sprouse's *Tom Strong*, and Lady Satan having guested in 2011 film *Avenging Force: The Scarab*, the threesome has cropped up intermittently in different places over the decades. While he has striven to make the story accessible for any newcomers, Segura has enjoyed delving into their chequered histories. "It's been interesting researching the original stories



“It’s been interesting researching the original stories behind these heroes”



► **SCI-FACT!** One of the original “Judgement Day” artists was Chris Halls, aka Chris Cunningham, who’s since become a leading video artist.



behind these heroes, and how they also fit into the modern Project Superpowers world,” he says. “I’ve also tried to be mindful that this might be the first time a reader experiences them, so it’s striking a balance that I found engaging.”

With its roots in old comic book arcana, *Scarlet Sisters* shares some common ground with Segura’s recent novel *Secret Identity*, which centres on a murder mystery at a fictional New York comics company in the 1970s.

“Thematically, many if not all of my stories are about characters overcoming their personal setbacks to do what’s right, or to reach for something that’s important to them,” he says. “And that’s integral to the story here.”

The Scarlet Sisters are drawn together by the murder of one of their allies, which proves to be only part of a much larger conspiracy. “From the first page, we’re introduced to a secretive, cult-like organisation that has its fingers in every part of the New York world, be it criminal or legitimate,” explains Segura. “They also have connections to the respective tragedies that drove each of the Sisters to become heroes, and they discover that they’re very much the last line of defence against this corrupt and supernatural cabal.”

Describing her work as “fantastic”, Segura formed a vibrant partnership with Italian artist Emiliana Pinna: “She has a great sense for camera angles and detail. It’s been a treat!” **SJ**

*Scarlet Sisters* is out now.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

## Return Of The Drokking Dead

**2000 AD** celebrates Prog 2300 with a zombieified multiverse of madness



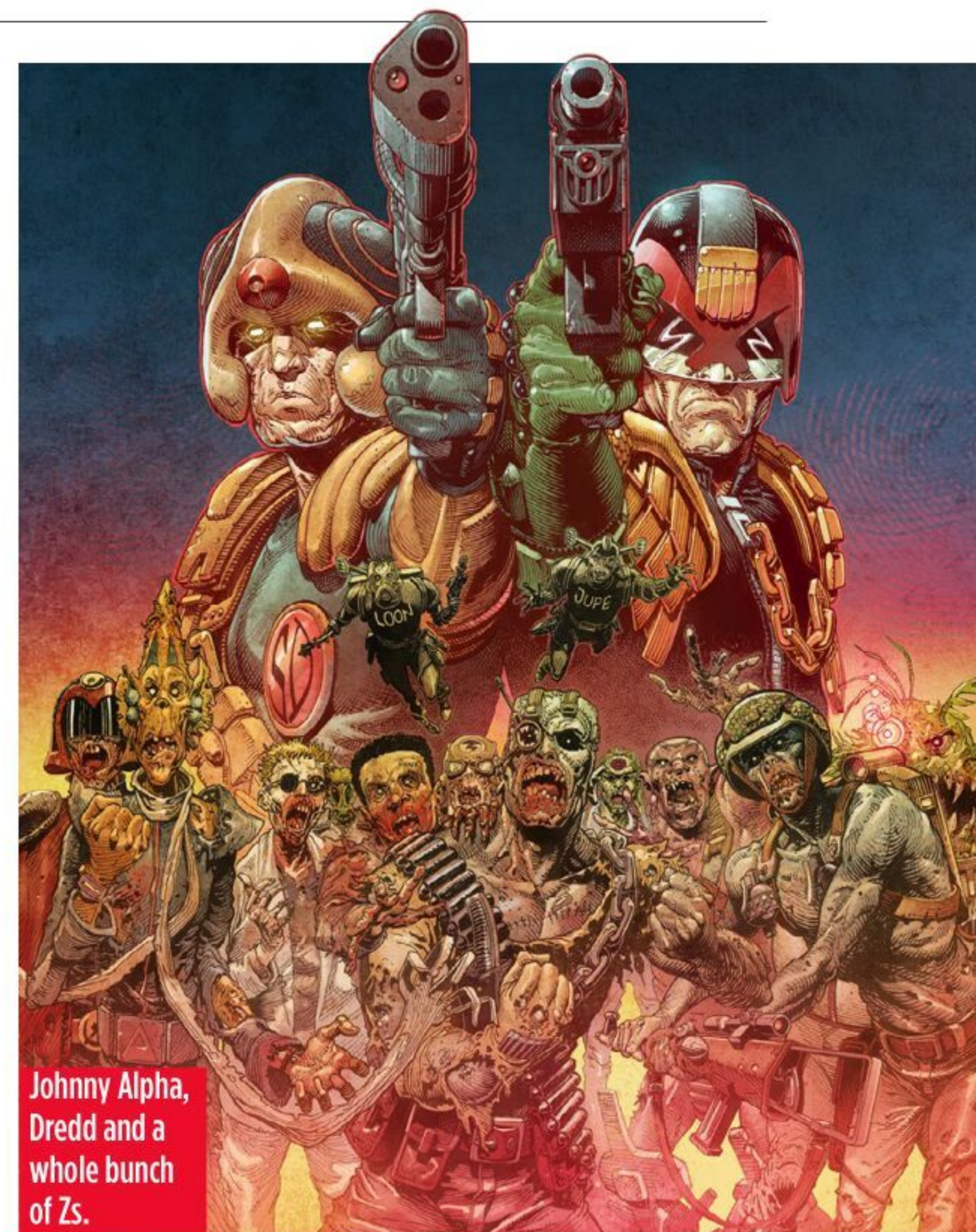
THREE DECADES AFTER IT FIRST appeared in both of the Galaxy’s Greatest Comics, undead *Dredd* epic “Judgement Day” is returning. “Judgement Days” begins in the landmark Prog 2300, before continuing in *Judge Dredd Magazine* 448. Lead writer Kenneth Niemand – who has penned both issues’ framing stories for artists Henry Flint and Leigh Gallagher – insists that it is no mere sequel to Garth Ennis and John Wagner’s original tale.

“It’s an alternative take on that story; a series of even more catastrophic events that happen because of a different decision that’s made at one point in the original story,” he tells Red Alert. “I wanted to do a big, fun story about zombies infecting the whole of the *2000 AD* multiverse. I knew the problem would start in Dredd’s world, and Dredd plus zombies equals Judgement Day. The other Dredd story it references is ‘Helter Skelter’, which introduced the idea of a multiverse where all the *2000 AD* stories happen.”

While “Judgement Day” concluded with Dredd forming an alliance with Johnny Alpha, the future cop and the top Strontium Dog won’t be partners on this occasion. “The major disruption to the timeline we know happens before the famous team-up scenes between Dredd and Johnny that we get at the end of ‘Judgement Day,’” explains Niemand.

“Before that point, they’re both enemies, so let’s just say that relationship continues here...”

“Instead of a strike team being sent in to deal with Sabbat,” adds *2000 AD* editor Matt Smith, referring to the nefarious



Johnny Alpha, Dredd and a whole bunch of Zs.

necromagus who’s behind the undead outbreak, “in this story a dimension bomb is dropped on him, which succeeds in blasting him out of existence but causes severe repercussions, which come back to bite Mega-City in a big way. Alpha returns to his own time but realises the extent of the damage that’s been done across the multiverse and comes back to try to right what’s happened. He won’t be teaming up with Dredd, who is a very different beast now.”

The impact of “Judgement Days” is also felt on Nu-Earth and Download, settings of *Rogue Trooper* and *Sinister Dexter*. “The Genetic Infantrymen’s bodies are incredibly durable, so perhaps even death doesn’t slow them down all that much,” reasons Michael Carroll, who is scripting “a zombieified *Rogue Trooper*” for artist Gary Erskine.

Dan Abnett, meanwhile, took a different approach. “I thought it’d be fun to subvert the idea a little, as I didn’t just want to write zombie *Sinister* and *Dexter*. I thought it would be interesting to see a world where all values – like life and death – were inverted. As hitmen, death was *Sinister* and *Dexter*’s business before the zombie apocalypse, so now they’re really making a killing!”

Aided by artist Kieran McKeown, Karl Stock is reviving ’80s competitive combaters *Mean Arena* as *Meat Arena*. “Future sport with zombies’ is almost a premise in its own right,” he laughs. “It’s a nasty piece of work, and I had George Romero’s blunt satire in the back of my mind as I wrote it.” **SJ**

*2000 AD Prog 2300* and *Judge Dredd Magazine* 448 are both out on 21 September.





DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Rust In Peace

Arthouse filmmaker  
Kogonada returns with sci-fi  
**After Yang**



Vicky (Ava DeMary) says  
goodbye to  
Yang.



IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ELEGANT and mournful film that explores a family coming to terms with the death of their robotic child, audiences might not expect a popstastic dance routine – but that's what they get in *After Yang*. Renowned arthouse filmmaker and video essayist Kogonada has the entire cast, dancing in

unison, in coordinating metallic dance wear. The utter joy of the scene is something of an anomaly, but for Kogonada that contrast is what gives the moment its power.

“Right at the writing of it I knew the mother was going to talk about how the family was going to work as a team and immediately I envisioned this hard cut to seeing this family in

sync, before we were going to start feeling them out of sync,” he tells Red Alert. The joy of watching the routine – which is part of 30,000 families performing the same dance across the globe – reflects Kogonada's adoration of the artform. “I love dance. I love dance and film especially. So if there's a reason to do it I'll try to find a reason. This felt like such a great way





to start a film that I knew was gonna be sort of pitched in a quiet space. To start with something explosive and joyous and in sync.”

Adapted from “Saying Goodbye To Yang”, a 2016 short story by Alexander Weinstein, *After Yang* is set in a future where humanoid AIs are considered beloved family members. Couple Jake (Colin Farrell) and Kyra (Jodie

Colin Farrell  
and Malea  
Emma  
Tjandrawidjaja.



Turner-Smith) have adopted Mika (Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja) and purchased Yang (Justin H Min) as a quasi-sibling and a connection to her Asian heritage. That merging of East and West extends beyond the household into the entire aesthetic of the film, from the architecture to the costumes.

“And that’s me too, I think I’m that fusion,” explains Kogonada, who is Korean-American. “It’s not just a reflection of my own personal sensibility. Our costume designer is from India and we talked about really incorporating all these sorts of tradition, but I think in regard to the tone and aesthetic it’s born in my own struggle with my own sense of being an identity, which is also thematic. This is about the construct of ‘Asian’, this idea of having to figure out what that means when you’re outside of your homeland.”

The future that these characters inhabit has a gentle poetry in the details. The history that led up to it is only alluded to, but there is a feeling of mourning in the air; that despite the current peacefulness, this is a society that has been traumatised.

“I knew it would not be necessarily visible,” Kogonada says. “You’d get peeks at it. There was a hope that it was sort of in the air and you felt a society in recovery.” Though the audience can only guess what has happened, Kogonada constructed a comprehensive history of this world and gave his team a clear-cut explanation.

“There are two things that we discussed. One was this long war with China, and then there was also this idea that there was this climate catastrophe and

that these new cities had to sort of be reshaped.” Where many visions of the future have a stark lack of plant life, with cities constructed from metal and glass, this world is in comparative harmony with the natural world. “These survivors had to make peace with nature because whatever the technologies they have they could no longer deny the necessity of having some sort of relationship with nature,” Kogonada explains. “It’s a society that has been humbled by their choices.”

## INTELLIGENCE TEST

As Jake sets off on his quest to get Yang repaired, he explores the interiority of AI. In particular, Kogonada wanted to explore whether an AI would actually choose to be human if they could. “There’s this Pinocchio syndrome where the longing of AI is to be human. But what if they were content with being AI? Being human has its own existential struggles and why would other beings, that might have a bit more contentment or maybe a greater sense of purpose, long for that?”

At present clones and convincingly humanoid robots don’t exist, but our relationship with technology is increasingly complex. Debates raging about designer babies and screen time have echoes in Kogonada’s future, but he admits that his ambiguous approach is rooted in his own uncertainty. “I don’t have any answers. I just think those questions, as we move forward and our emotional lives get entangled with our technologies, are important things to consider.” **LL**

*After Yang* is on Sky Cinema/in cinemas from 22 September.





CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

## Four Play

History repeats for the Fantastic Four in Alex Ross's new graphic novel **Full Circle**



"I WAS DRIVEN TO make this book more than anything else I've thought about for years," says Alex Ross, whose passion project *Fantastic Four: Full Circle* is his first work as a writer/artist, after previously co-authoring seminal series like *Marvels* and DC's *Kingdom Come*. "I felt that I had something to contribute that needed to get out, and I had a single graphic novel storyline it could be wrapped up

in," he tells Red Alert. "To get it across in the right way needed some kind of different format, and luckily, there was an opportunity to create a special package with Abrams' MarvelArts line. That sense of looking like a book first instead of being a traditional comic format that could be collected later was key to satisfying the urge."

The project initially began with Ross being approached to see if he

wanted to create anything special for the 60th anniversary of Marvel's First Family. "All of *Full Circle* is wrapped up in the ambitions I had towards the *Fantastic Four*," he explains. "I never expected that I had so much to say about this group of characters that wasn't already addressed in prior comics I've worked on, but I found that I had a yearning to present them a certain way. I thought that I could connect my work with the original series artist/co-creator Jack Kirby and

**"All of it is wrapped up in the ambitions I had towards the *Fantastic Four*"**

visualise his designs and artistic language in a way that might refresh an appreciation for his vision. The fact that this group was central to Marvel's identity and was ultimately the cornerstone from which the House of Ideas was built is always an inspiration."

Revisiting one of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's classic storylines, *Full Circle* opens with the Baxter Building being invaded by a swarm of parasites, prompting the foursome to journey to the Negative Zone. "I probably could have applied my interest to something less rooted in the *Fantastic Four*'s past if I didn't have the audaciousness of thinking I had the right to do a direct sequel to the book's most celebrated single issue," says Ross. "As it worked out, no one had really





➤ **SCI-FACT!** Kate Mulgrew has voiced animated characters in *Batman*, *Aladdin*, *Gargoyles* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

done a pure follow-up out of respect for that story. But I had no such restraint!”

Pitting the group against the insectoid tyrant Annihilus, Ross adopted a particularly vibrant palette for the Antimatter Underverse. “I knew that an aspect of the Day-Glo blacklight poster era was something I wanted to represent, so I used the Negative Zone environment as a justification for this colour approach,” he adds. “And there was no way I was going to go to that place without showing its most well-known denizen Annihilus, so he became the main classic villain to appear in the story.”

Aside from fleeting appearances from Reed and Sue’s children Franklin and Valeria, *Full Circle* focuses on the original quartet, with no cameos from the numerous supporting characters the team has accumulated over the decades. “We’re in a unique period for the Fantastic Four to be re-presented to the world at large, especially as they’re planning a feature film again,” reasons Ross, referring to November 2024’s upcoming movie. “I wanted to focus on the core fun of the group’s dynamic, so adding more personalities into the mix distracts from the ‘four’ principle.” **SJ**

*Fantastic Four: Full Circle* is out on 15 September.



ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

## What Kate Did Next

**Kate Mulgrew** on her return to live-action sci-fi as a CIA agent in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*

### What’s changed in genre programming since *Star Trek: Voyager*?

➤ Technical and technological sophistication notwithstanding, I think that on every conceivable platform, it’s advanced. When you look at *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, you see what [showrunner Alex] Kurtzman is doing with this 10-part series and there are no holds barred. The sky – I should say space – is the limit, the production values are out of this world. These are values that we didn’t have in the ‘90s when I was doing *Star Trek: Voyager*. The digital world has just endowed our business with every possibility to enchant. And Kurtzman is unafraid to employ them. Also, there’s a daring quality, tighter quality, more dangerous, edgier quality to the writing.

### Do these changes make you more amenable to genre series again?

➤ *The Man Who Fell To Earth* did indeed whet my appetite. I found the writing to be so smart. When you’re working on that level of sophistication, it’s a pleasure to play. And when you get a partner like Jimmy Simpson, who’s that good, it’s just, “Don’t ever let this end. Give me 100 takes, not two.” Then when they’re not screaming about the budget in every part of your ear, when the day is long, but rich and very rewarding, it’s just great.

### The creators of *Star Trek: Prodigy* have said that things are coming that will impact the other surrounding series. What can you hint at?

➤ Well, I can tell you that some of the old guard will be joining us. And there will be new recruits who will thrill, devastate and enchant. It

will begin to draw wider and wider circles, always coming back to the original. I think the [showrunners] Hageman’s vision is altogether splendid. You’re going to take a trip that you didn’t expect you’d take. And you *did* expect that you would take an extraordinary trip.

### How do you feel about a return to live-action *Star Trek*?

➤ The door seems to be creaking a tiny bit open, only because there’s been such a resurgence of interest. I probably am thinking it would be something to look at now. Certainly no one has come to me directly.

### It’s understandable that people distance themselves from a character for a time.

➤ Well, with the captains, because it’s so all-consuming. And we’re not captains, we’re actors. So we happily stumble across the golden opportunity of being able to be a captain, but then it is so absorbing that you need to step away for a minute, and see who you are as an actor again. That’s exactly what I did. Now it’s been about 25 years and I see that Janeway gave me great, great pleasure.

### What’s the strangest thing you’ve seen your face on?

➤ A man’s arm in Phoenix, Arizona. He asked me to sign something. He had “I love Janeway forever” tattooed on his whole arm. I said, “What possessed you, man?” He said “I’m having the other arm done next year.” **DS**

*The Man Who Fell To Earth* and *Star Trek: Prodigy* are on Paramount+ in the UK and US now.





CAST EXCLUSIVE

# Vive La Revolution

**Andor** proves there's more than one way to overthrow an Empire...

## The Fighter

Diego Luna plays Cassian Andor

Cassian Andor: a (doomed) man on a mission.

**I**n *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, Cassian Andor was one of the brave – but doomed – Rebels who nabbed some famous Death Star plans from the Empire. In *Andor*, we'll learn how he became a pivotal figure in the Alliance.

**Cassian Andor famously died at the end of *Rogue One*. What was your reaction when Lucasfilm suggested bringing the character back for a prequel?**

➔ I thought it felt right, and that it was a great idea. It was an open space for creativity, complete freedom, because very little had been said about Cassian and about his story, so we had room to come up with great ideas, with a great team lead by Tony Gilroy [showrunner]. The show lives where I like stories to live, where

the grey areas are, where contrast happens, and where nuances are important and quite vast.

**We know that Cassian's home world, Fest, was effectively destroyed by the Empire when he was a kid. Is that a big motivating factor behind the man he has become by the start of *Andor*?**

➔ I think so. It's quite interesting that no one speaks like him in *Rogue One* – no one has that accent, no one seems to come where he comes from. It must be hardcore not to have those kinds

of connections – it's like [knowing] everything can be taken away from you. Imagine having that certainty, and that's the kind of character we're talking about.

**Did you do much research into real-life revolutionaries and what drives them?**

➔ No one wakes up saying, "I'm going to do this and I'm going to bring about this change." So many times you find these characters were part of the problem before they've understood they could be part of the solution. That contradiction is really interesting

**“We had room to come up with great ideas, with a great team”**

because then it gives you a very dramatic arc. With most of these characters, either they start where they don't want to end or it's the other way round, but there's always a gigantic path they have to go through where they end up transforming. That's what's beautiful.

As far as possible, it'll be connected to many, many experiences that are real, and we also had the reference of the [*Star Wars*] galaxy we are part of. Saying we are in a galaxy far, far away is a great tool to talk about our own galaxy.



Forest Whitaker as Saw Gerrera in *Andor*.



Mon Mothma:  
pen mightier  
than sword?  
Perhaps.

## The Politician

**Genevieve O'Reilly plays Mon Mothma**

**G**enevieve O'Reilly first played Mon Mothma in scenes (mostly deleted for running time) in *Revenge Of The Sith*. Having reprised the role in *Star Wars Rebels* and *Rogue One*, she's back in *Andor* as the honourable senator for Chandrila.

**Although Mon Mothma features (very briefly) in *Return Of The Jedi*, we don't know much about her. Has it been fun to fill in her backstory?**

➤ I always go back to Caroline Blakiston's performance in that piece. I think what she did with a very small amount of screen time was to evoke a character of great grace, humility and nobility. And

yet for me, there was something quite painful at the centre of it, like I could see a weight she was carrying. She has that very famous line that people say a lot, that many Bothans died to bring us this information, so you could see she was carrying a lot of pain. I have always been curious about that. What has she personally sacrificed to get to this moment? What is it to be the leader of a rebellion?

**As a politician, her approach is clearly different to that of the more get-your-hands-dirty Cassian Andor – but perhaps there wouldn't be a Rebel Alliance without those different perspectives?**

➤ It's not just those two. I think

history shows us that any great rebellion requires many people working to effect change within their own spheres, to allow them to eventually collide and create an effective rebellion. Luke Skywalker isn't in his X-wing fighter attacking the Death Star without the plans that Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor stole [in *Rogue One*]. And before that, there's been layers of little things that have to come together for those two to meet.

**“I'm not sure we always see solutions directly in front of us”**

**In the deleted scenes from *Revenge Of The Sith*, Mon Mothma meets with fellow senators Padmé Amidala and Bail Organa to discuss Palpatine's power grab. Do you think she regrets that they couldn't do more to stop him?**

➤ I think that's really interesting. History moves slowly but through a reflective lens, it moves very fast – and it must feel like that for her. I'm not sure we always see solutions directly in front of us. It is sometimes when we are at the very pointy end of the stick that we *can* make the decisions that perhaps we couldn't without having that exterior pressure. Sometimes life has to do that for you. **RE**

*The first three episodes of *Andor* debut on Disney+ on 21 September.*

**➤ SCI-FACT!** *Andor's* score will be provided by Nicholas Britell, the award-winning composer for *Succession* and *The Underground Railroad*.



DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Grievous Bodily Harm

Surgery is the new sex in **Crimes Of The Future**, David Cronenberg's long-awaited cinematic comeback



THE KING OF BODY HORROR IS BACK. Eight years since *Maps To The Stars*, David Cronenberg is finally behind the camera again with *Crimes Of The Future*. Just don't ask him what led to it. "The inspiration for this? I don't remember," he grins. That's fair enough; the 79-year-old wrote the script over two decades ago, when it was titled *Painkillers*. After twice failing to fund the film, he was prompted by his producer Robert Lantos to take another look. "I said, 'Why? I don't even remember it!'"

When he did read it, it immediately struck a chord. An "extrapolation into the future" that feels eerily prescient, it's set in a bleak world where human organs are rapidly evolving. Viggo Mortensen plays Saul Tenser, an extreme

performance artist who uses his body and its innards as the centrepiece of his bizarre shows. Joining him is Caprice (Léa Seydoux), a former surgeon and his glamorous assistant, in a film that feels a spiritual cousin to earlier Cronenberg films *Videodrome*, *Crash* and *eXistenZ*.

The Canadian wasn't trying to self-consciously reference his earlier work, however. "When I was writing this script, I'm not thinking about those other films at all," he reasons. "I know that there will be connections... because it's coming from my own nervous system. But when I'm making the film, I'm only thinking about this film as an entity on its own. I'm not really thinking about other films at all, or references to other films, even though I know those connections will be there."

Cronenberg  
and  
Mortensen,  
boning up.





Timlin (Kristen Stewart) and Caprice (Léa Seydoux).



"Now this may hurt... quite a lot, actually."



"Yeah... it looks like a piece of spinach."

This time, he's exploring the way bodies can be controlled by the state. In the film, the National Organ Registry – a shadowy government organisation, run by Wippet (Don McKellar) and Timlin (Kristen Stewart) – investigates Tenser's work. That the film arrives just as the US Supreme Court overruled the Roe v Wade ruling relating to abortion rights makes it feel even more timely. "In Canada... we think the US has gone completely bananas," says Cronenberg. "Not just about Roe vs Wade, but everything else!"

If crimes of the future involve self-mutilation and harvesting organs for artistic endeavour, the crimes of the present are surely to do with the environmental catastrophe the world is facing. One of the film's most spot-on elements is a subplot involving a young boy who is capable of digesting plastic – a clear nod to the way that microplastics are now being detected in animals and even humans. Given that Cronenberg wrote the script in 1998, it was an uncanny vision of the shape of things to come.

While the film's idea of ingesting plastic is satirical, "there's some reality to it," he adds, "because recently, I was reading about scientists who are trying to make an edible plastic that will provide nourishment and protein. Because there are bacteria on Earth. And these are single-celled animals, but they are animals, that can eat plastic and live on it and function with it. If it's possible on that level, then it's possible on a human level. So that's one of the proposals of the movie."

## INCREDIBLE INTIMACY

If this all sounds very esoteric, fans will be relieved to see that Cronenberg is also back to his tactile – and stomach-churning – best. The film features several weird and wonderful biomechanical gizmos to assist those facing radical bodily change. In constant pain due to his ever-evolving organs, Tenser spends his days in contraptions like the Breakfast chair, which twists and turns, moving him constantly to aid his digestion.

Cronenberg's original ideas for these devices were "very mechanical", he says, until he turned over the script to Carol Spier, his production designer on nearly every film for over four decades. "In design terms we ended up going much further, with very organic and flesh-like and bone-like creations. These were designs that evolved over many months of discussion and attempts to make what was in the script work as it was written."

While these fleshy devices feel like throwbacks to early Cronenberg – Max Renn's VHS-like stomach in *Videodrome* springs to mind – they also required willing participants. The director credits his cast – especially Mortensen and Seydoux, who both had to endure several nude scenes.

"These actors were not afraid," he notes. "And that's what you want as a director. You are asking a lot from them... you are asking for an incredible intimacy."

Although Mortensen is an actor he's previously worked with three times, beginning with *A History Of Violence*, Seydoux was a new collaborator for the Canadian. Armed with "an incredible emotional sense", she helped create what might be Cronenberg's most intimate film yet.

"I think all of my films are incredibly intimate," he counters. "What you film most as a filmmaker is the human body. That's what you're working with." After all, he says, "there's nothing more intimate than a close-up." **JM**

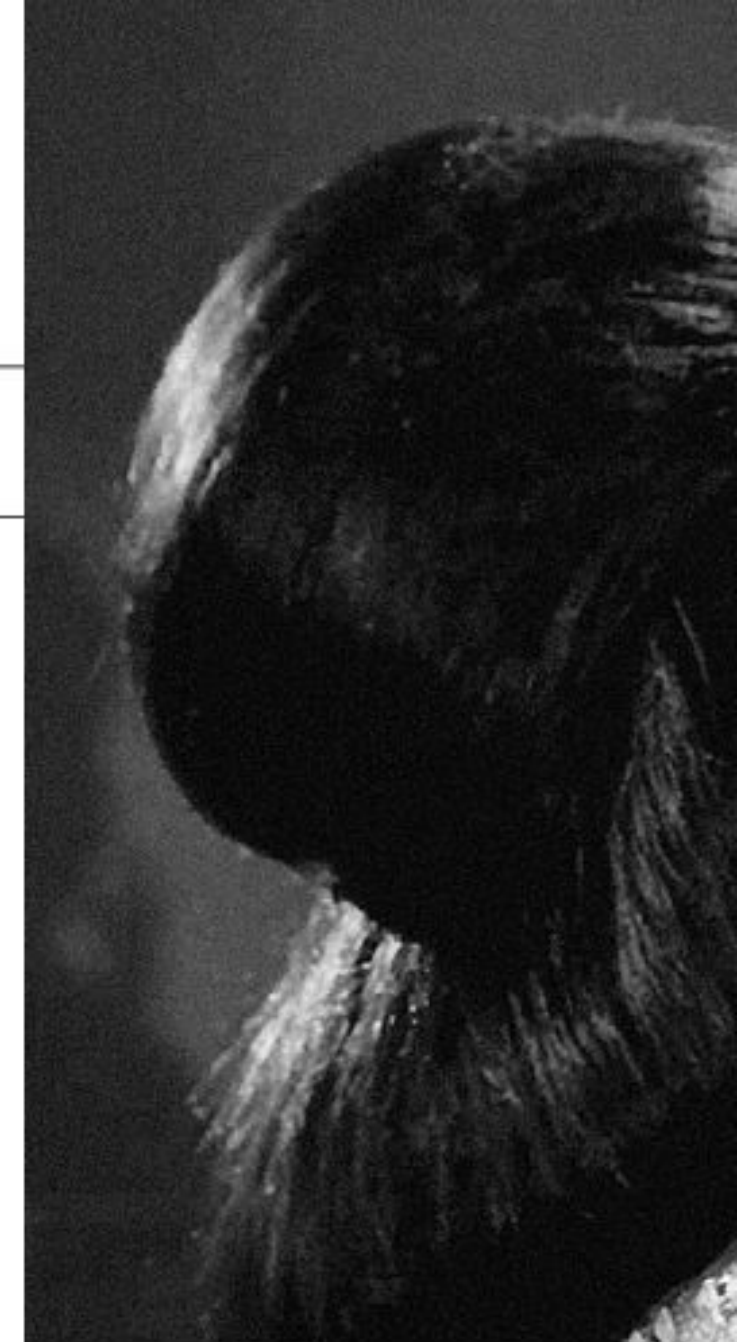
*Crimes Of The Future* is in cinemas from 9 September.





# Nichelle Nichols 1932-2022

Remembering a true pioneer of the final frontier



Nichelle Nichols in the role that made her famous.



“WHAT’S A *STAR Trek*?” wondered Nichelle Nichols, nonplussed by the telegram in her hand. Her agent was insisting she return immediately from England for a TV audition in the States. Nichols ignored the telegram. And the next one. Only when the now irate rep finally found her by phone did she realise that pop-culture destiny was non-negotiable.

Arguably the defining icon of *Star Trek*’s inclusive vision of the future, Nichols was born in Robbins, Illinois. She studied dance at the Chicago Ballet Academy from the age of 12 and began a professional career as a singer and dancer at 14, going on to tour America, Canada and Europe with Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton’s jazz bands.

In 1964 she appeared in a racially electrified episode of Gene Roddenberry’s marine corps drama *The Lieutenant*. It was a role of rare substance for a black actor on American television; more typical was a turn as an African princess on *Tarzan*. “Every week there was an African princess,” Nichols reflected, years later. “You were either a chief, a princess, a prince or a witch doctor.”

Uhura promised more. A last-minute addition to the bridge crew, the Enterprise’s communications officer looked to be a capable, essential part of the ensemble. “It was actually one of the lead roles,” said Nichols, who winced as Uhura’s role was diminished in rewrites, script after script. “I thought it was very cruel to give us the original scripts, which had terrific parts in them, and then to see your part get cut, cut, cut.” As she remembered, “Everyone was scared to death of having a black and a woman in an equal role.”

Frustrated, she planned to quit, only to reconsider after a chance







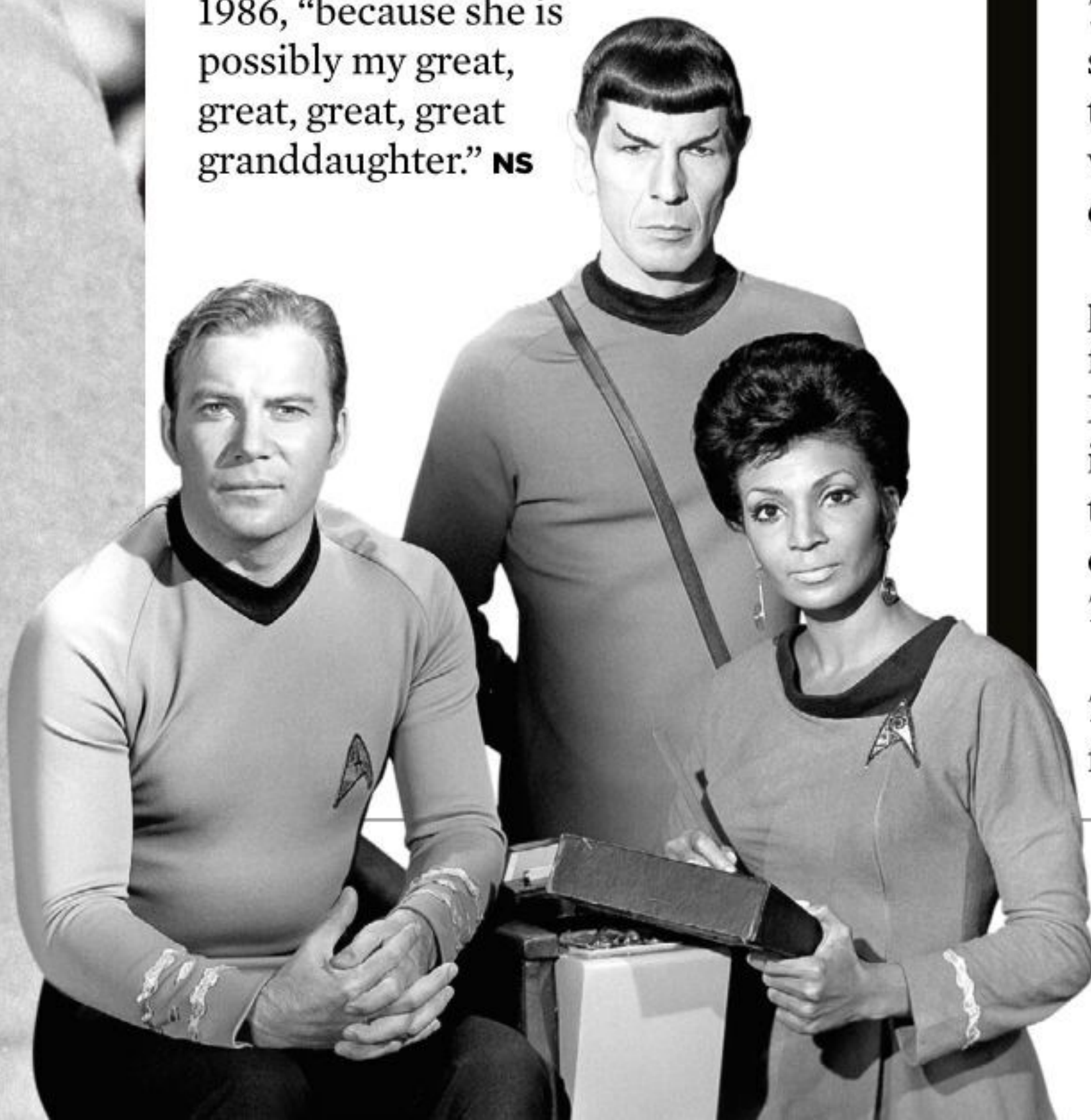
Often credited as the first interracial kiss on US TV.

## “Everyone was scared to death of having a black and a woman in an equal role”

encounter with civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King: “He said Uhura was *not* a small character, that I was 10 feet tall and that I was opening many doors.” And Uhura was *seen*: the gifted, charismatic Nichols made the front cover of *Ebony*, and an interracial kiss with co-star William Shatner in “Plato’s Stepchildren” remains a talking point in TV history.

Nichols voiced Uhura in *Star Trek: The Animated Series* and returned for the series of movies starring the original cast. Beyond the 23rd century she shook up her image to play a salty, hard-nosed madam in 1974 blaxploitation classic *Truck Turner*, then used her *Trek* fame to help NASA recruit ethnic minorities and women – including Sally Ride, America’s first woman in space.

Winning fans from Muhammad Ali to Whoopi Goldberg and Barack Obama, Nichols’s frustrations with scripts and screen time didn’t detract from her relationship with Uhura. “I’m very proud of her,” she said in 1986, “because she is possibly my great, great, great, great granddaughter.” **NS**



## THE FINAL FRONTIER



David Warner as Chancellor Gorkon in *Star Trek VI*.

## David Warner 1941-2022

➔ IN 1974’S *FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE* AN unearthly, mirror-dwelling evil tells David Warner “We are legion” – before claiming his face for its own. The entity could have been describing the Manchester-born actor’s prolific amount of screen roles over the coming decades. That Amicus Productions chiller may have been Warner’s first brush with horror, but his raw-boned, sepulchral features ensured he became a genre mainstay.

Trained at RADA, Warner was an acclaimed Hamlet at the RSC in 1965 and made a BAFTA-nominated big-screen breakthrough the next year in *Morgan: A Suitable Case For Treatment*. Cinema soon capitalised on a presence that could tilt effortlessly from haunter to haunt.

As conspiracy-minded photographer Keith Jennings, he earned the most memorable of *The Omen*’s many death scenes, decapitated by satanic forces, and conjured an authentically terrifying Jack the Ripper in *Time After Time*, which loosed the Victorian killer on modern-day San Francisco.

Terry Gilliam’s *Time Bandits* saw Warner play the reality-twisting Evil, while 1982’s *Tron* found him as sinister software executive Dillinger, expanding his matchless creepiness into the digital realm. *Star Trek* mined his talent on multiple occasions: wasted as dissolute Federation envoy St John Talbot in *The Final Frontier*, he brought compassion and gravitas to Klingon chancellor Gorkon in *The Undiscovered Country* and was the formidable Cardassian interrogator Gul

Madred in *The Next Generation* two-parter “Chain Of Command”.

Warner’s genre legacy is everywhere: the voice of Ra’s al Ghul in *Batman: The Animated Series*, Jor-El in *The New Adventures Of Superman*, the reanimated creature opposite Carrie Fisher in 1984’s *Frankenstein*. From *Twin Peaks* to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret Of The Ooze*, he was a modest, hard-working icon, the crucial connective tissue in so much screen fantasy. Not bad for a man who once claimed he was motivated by “a driving lack of ambition”.

## Bernard Cribbins 1928-2022

➔ ONE OF THE MOST BELOVED OF British entertainers, Bernard Cribbins brought a trademark warmth and quirkiness to his excursions into screen fantasy. Hammer’s 1965 adaptation of H Rider Haggard’s *She* teamed him with Peter Cushing, and the pair reunited the next year in *Daleks’ Invasion Earth 2150 AD*, where Cribbins mixed slapstick with bravado as companion Tom Campbell.

After guest shots in *The Avengers*, *Casino Royale* (1967) and *Space: 1999* he returned to *Doctor Who* in 2007 as Wilfred Mott, a role he recently reprised for the show’s 60th anniversary specials. Cribbins was also a serious contender for the Doctor himself after Jon Pertwee quit in 1974.

## Alan Grant 1949-2022

➔ BRITISH COMICS WRITER KNOWN FOR his work on *2000 AD* and *Batman*, co-creating Victor Zsasz and the Ventriloquist. **NS**



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# sins Of The Father

**Religion and family go head-to-head as  
Chucky returns to wreak revenge once more**

**WORDS: DARREN SCOTT**









Jake (Zackary Arthur), Devon (Björgvin Arnarson).

**Y**OU KNOW THAT spooky season has officially begun when you sit down with *Child's Play* creator, writer, director and executive producer Don Mancini. Why? Because it means that his demon doll is heading back to stalk us, just in time for Halloween.

After seven big-screen outings, Chucky came to terrorise television screens last October in his first self-titled series. Not a reboot, not a remake but a continuation of the 34-year legacy – with all the complicated and kooky bits included – the show was a smash hit.

When we catch up with Mancini – called from “a little emergency” on set that we can only imagine has ginger hair – he’s shooting the last block of *Chucky* season two, comprising the final two episodes, seven and eight. “Knock wood,” he grins, “I’m feeling good about it. I think fans are gonna dig it.”

The studio and network, he says, have been incredibly supportive from the beginning of the journey to reanimate Chucky once more. This, he notes, is because of a genuine love from them for the character and the genre. “That’s not always the case,” he chuckles, citing that “horror/slasher stuff” might not necessarily always be people’s “thing”.

“I’ve been around a long time now – a lot of these executives grew up on Chucky. So they’re just genuinely enthusiastic about the character and the franchise and the show.”

#### **FAMILY AFFAIR**

The success of the first season, Mancini considers, probably makes them “feel even more bullish about it.” But as we discussed way back in *SFX* 344, it was never taken for granted that the show would land, let alone guarantee a second run.

“I felt good,” Mancini says of his pre-season one thoughts, “but going into any new venture,

particularly with an established film franchise, making the transition into another medium inherently there is some roll of the dice there. You just don’t know for sure. So that was always a little interesting and stressful and thrilling, but people liked it, fortunately.”

Those same thrills have brought him back for more, with a promise to expand things further still, pulling more from the franchise’s legacy. “I always was excited about the opportunity of having the sheer storytelling real estate and time to delve into relationships, and the backstories of characters like Charles Lee Ray and Tiffany, that fans have been wondering about over the years,” he explains.

“Now of course, with this season, we’re finding out what became of Glen and Glenda. So I think television is the perfect medium to explore all of these different avenues.”

The origins of Chucky’s queer child were first told in 2004’s *Seed Of Chucky*. Now *Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina* star Lachlan





A puppeteer gives Chucky his starring moment.



Lexy (Alyvia Alyn Lind) and Nadine (Bella Higginbotham).

Watson joins the cast to continue their story. “Lachlan is amazing,” Mancini enthuses. “They’re *such* an amazing actor. It’s really been thrilling bringing back these characters that we created two decades ago. As you know, that movie, when it first opened, was not successful. Which was, of course, disappointing.

“But over the years, it’s really sort of come into its own in a way, which has been very gratifying. I love hearing from queer kids, gay kids, trans kids telling me how much Glen/Glenda meant to them. So to be able to explore those characters again, and pick up where they might be in their lives now, it’s been really fun, challenging and interesting. And Lachlan, as I said, is just the perfect performer to do this.”

In perhaps a sign of times finally changing, there’s been an outpouring of love for the queer

## “These characters, they’re not tortured in the traditional ways of queer characters”

elements of the series. As a gay man working in the industry, could he have anticipated that?

“Well, I hoped for it, of course,” he considers, “because it’s something that we’ve been doing for many years now, since before it was in vogue. Starting with *Bride Of Chucky* and *Seed Of Chucky*, we started leaning into queer themes, queer characters and queer stories. I’ve just kept that going over the years.

“It’s so nice. Just as a marker of where we are, culturally, now that we can do this, and depict a sweet teenage gay romance. These characters, they’re not tortured in the traditional ways of queer characters – it almost seemed like they had to be tortured in certain ways. And now they’re not, their love fulfils them and helps them defeat the monster and it was also just sort of fun that the monster himself,” he bursts out laughing, “he’s cool with it. That’s not his problem with any of these characters. He just gets frustrated if he can’t get them to do his bidding, or if he can’t corrupt them and get them to kill, but it’s like, ‘Oh, you’re gay? Like, I’ll kill anybody.’”

### LIKE A PRAYER

Unsurprisingly, this continues in the new season, with Mancini setting the action in a location that will create friction from the start.

“A lot of the story takes place at this Catholic reform school where the kids get sent,” he says. “Why did they get sent there? You’ll find out when the season begins! But yes, it’s very connected to Chucky, of course. One of the things I’ve liked doing over the years with the franchise is delving into different subgenres of horror, and one of my favourite subgenres of horror has always been the Catholic-based spooky horror movies like *The Omen* and *The Exorcist*.

“So being able to put Chucky in that world – Chucky with priests and nuns and Chucky in a mass, in confession, intersecting all of that stuff, that was really a lot of fun. I think that people will get a kick out of that.”

This, obviously, is going to spell trouble for Jake and Devon in more ways than one... “Of course! Yes, of course, that’s one of the first →





issues that comes up for Jake and Devon when they arrive. Of course they know that Catholics are not exactly down with the gays, and how does that affect their relationship when they are now stuck in an institution that officially rejects them, officially tells them that they're wrong?

"I was raised in the Catholic Church, so that's something that I dealt with as a young gay kid," he explains. "With season one, and the character of Jacob, it was more autobiographical than I'd ever been before. Which was a little scary, in a way. But I think it paid off because people responded to the realness of that stuff, with Jake and his father and Jake and Devon."

"So I wanted to continue to explore that. This is something that lots of gay kids, whether it's in the Catholic religion or whatever, a lot of religious institutions, as we know, are not down with the gays. So yeah, it's something to deal with."

It sounds, we wager, that season two has been even more cathartic for him.

"Yeah," he laughs loudly. "It's been incredibly cathartic. Actually, not just for me, but a lot of people on the show behind the camera and in front of it. A lot of us turned out to be lapsed Catholics," he laughs again. "So I think a lot of people are identifying with it and working out some chips that they've had on their shoulders for a while."

"We continue to explore the relationship between the boys and seeing how religion can potentially impact that. Then there are other things that affect their relationship during the course of this season. I don't want to give away too much, but it's very important to keep that relationship a focus of the show."

Devon Sawa returns... but who is he playing?



Relationships have also formed a huge part of this season off-set, with Mancini now having an established rapport with his new and younger ensemble.

"It's been fun getting to know them, and then writing toward their talents because on season one we wrote everything and then cast," he explains. "But with season two, I got to do with the kids as I've been doing with Brad, Jennifer, Fiona, Alex and Christine for decades, which is being able to write to specific actors strengths and interests."

"So for example, Björgvin, who plays Devon, that character in season one was very earnest. And Björgvin played that beautifully. But in real life Björgvin, I mean, he is earnest and sincere but also he's fucking hilarious. He's such a funny guy and he has such a funny dry

sense of humour. So this year, we wrote to that, so we could exploit that a little bit."

### GAGGED AND BOUND

As for what else is in store for the current season, he's obviously reluctant to go into spoiler territory. "We do up the ante. One thing I can say, because it's been set up at the end of the last season – there are 72 Chuckys on this truck. Andy has commandeered it but then he's held hostage by the Tiffany doll. So what does that perhaps imply?" he laughs loudly, aware of the chaos he's about to unleash on his long-suffering characters. "I can point to that element as a hint as to how we up the ante."

He's also excited about a *Bound* reunion on the show, bringing back stars from the Wachowskis' 1996 noir-crime movie.





Lexy's sister is too young to be playing with knives.

"That was really exciting for me to reunite Jen with Gina Gershon and Joey [Pantoliano] from *Bound*. So exciting to work with Meg Tilly as well. I've known them a bit over the years through Jen, but getting to work with them as actors, that was really thrilling because all of those actors have meant so much to me, as they have to most film fans over the years. So I think that's something fans – and also particularly queer fans – are really going to like, is seeing those actors reunited."

And what about the future – is the seed of Chucky firmly planted this time?

"We're all down for season three, if the audience is down with it," Mancini states. "We definitely have new places to go with these characters, new stories to tell and themes to explore. So, fingers crossed."

He says that he has a plan in "broad strokes" as that's part of the process of pitching a show to a network. "They want to know ideally, can this go the distance, can this sustain for five or so years? For season three, it's getting more solidified. I'm ready," he laughs. "I'm ready to go. All they have to do is give us the word."

Mancini's love of working in this medium shines through. He says that it's not just the ability to tell longform stories – he

genuinely loves the production side of things. "You shoot an eight-episode television show, you're shooting for 100-plus days," he says when talking about previous experience of 30-50 day shoots for one 90-minute instalment. "It's kind of a marathon and I think you have to have a certain endurance. I was a runner as a kid so I have that kind of training in a way, an appreciation for long-term goals."

He likens the process of working with all different departments to being a theatre kid in high school. "How joyous that is! That joy of being part of a troupe, or repertory company, and you put on different plays, and you get to know each other as a family, behind the scenes, all of that I love."

"We've sustained that for decades with the movies. But on the TV show, we're just doing more of it, we're just spending more time together making stuff. We're all like, 'Hey, I could do this for another five or seven years, couldn't you?' And they're like, 'Fuck yeah, this is great!' So that's another reason I selfishly hope we get to go further."

What about plans for other Chucky ventures away from television? "We have plans for diversification and I can say absolutely nothing more about it!" he chuckles. "Another thing I



Lexy, sister Caroline and their mum Michelle.

love about television," he says, bringing the conversation back to the here and now, "is that it can accommodate my own sort of restlessness with regard to tone, because I like to range widely. I like dealing with the earnest teenage romance and the seriousness of some of those queer themes, and I love dealing with suspense and tension and horror, but I also love comedy. I love character comedy."

"I love dialogue. It's always really important to me that the talk in the show, and in the movies, is memorable. So I hope that fans will find all of that new stuff that we're giving them, that it's still a delicious meal, delicious enough to want yet another course."

Father, we give thanks for this meal... ●

*Chucky is on USA/Syfy from 5 October. UK details are TBC.*





**“you’d think you wouldn’t be scared of it, but he’s freaky...”**

**ZACKARY ARTHUR**  
is Jake Wheeler

**What was your first experience of seeing horror on the screen?**

When I was younger, my parents didn’t really let me watch movies from the horror genre. It kind of makes sense. But of course, as I got older, I loved watching horror movies. I think my first time I was really freaked out was for an *Annabelle* commercial. And I was nine years old or something. I jumped behind the couch because I was so scared.

**Did you know early on that Jake and Devon would get together?**

One of the audition scenes was when Jake and Devon meet. So I already knew that that was going to be part of the storyline and also Don expanded upon it. I actually ended up going through some chemistry reads. I remember getting on with Björgvin, and it just worked so smooth, and I kind of knew that he would be the one who would get the part and it’d be great. And, you know, it ended up being great.

**The response to the couple has been great...**

Oh, it’s been really good. I’m receiving messages from people saying how much they related to the character, and how much it’s helped them. And honestly, seeing that makes my day. The thing about this show is that the characters are gay, and that’s it. It doesn’t throw it in your face, you know what I mean? It’s just, like, they’re just living it and that’s what they are. I think that’s what’s great about Don’s writing.

**Did any of the OG cast give you advice?**

When I first met Alex [Vincent, who plays

Jake (Zackary Arthur): not happy with his new school.

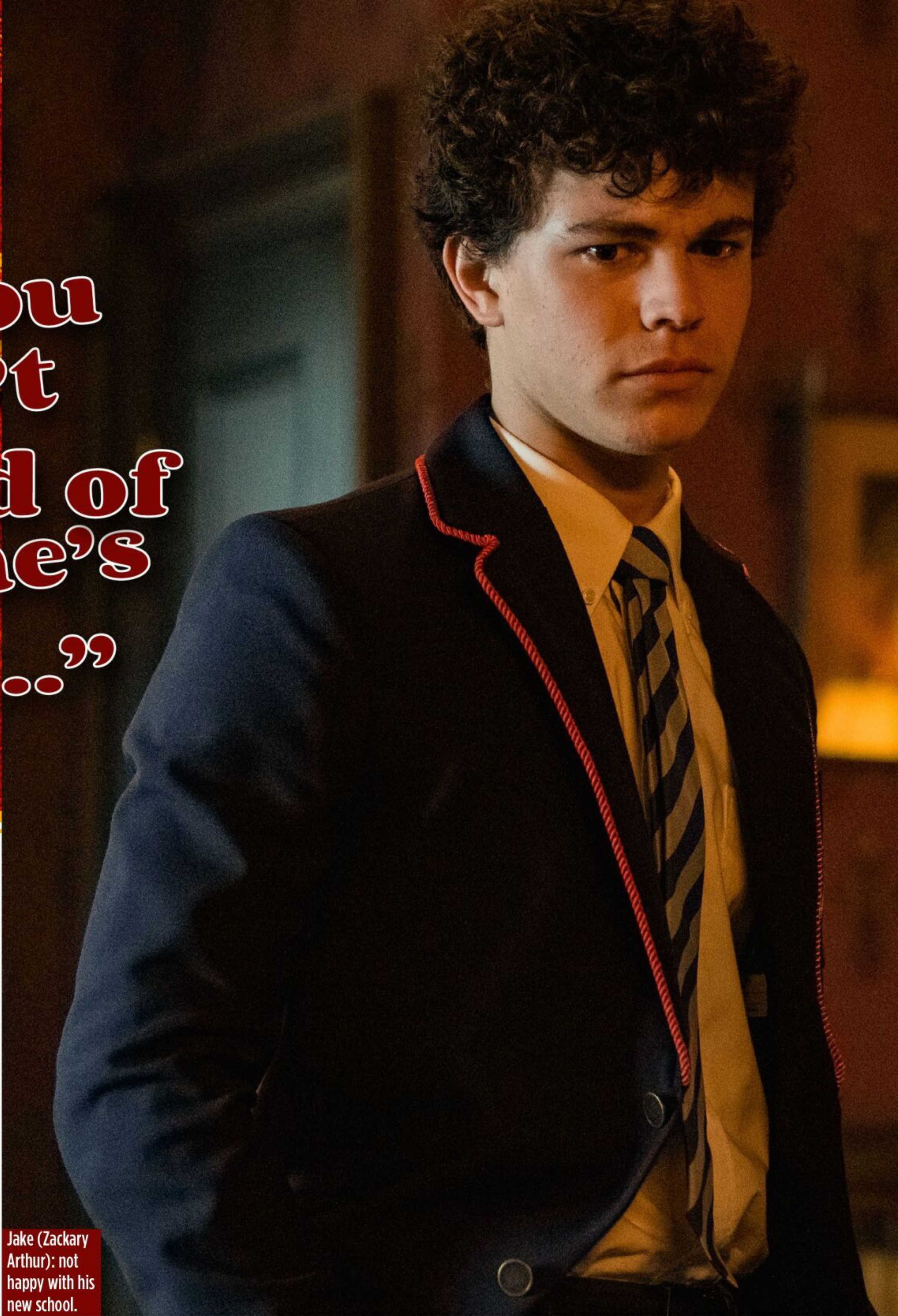
**“I’m not worried about coming back every 40 years, because honestly, I really enjoy it”**

Andy Barclay], we had a conversation about how long he’s been with the Chucky family – there was actually a line in the first season where he says, “My earliest memories are of Chucky.” He told me that that was actually kind of really true for him. That’s his earliest

memories, so it was pretty crazy for him to come back 40 years later and do it again. This set has been the greatest moments of my life. Everybody’s so nice and it’s just so welcoming. It doesn’t even really feel like a job. It’s like a summer camp. I’m not worried about coming back every 40 years, because honestly, I really enjoy it.

**Do you share any of Jake’s character traits?**

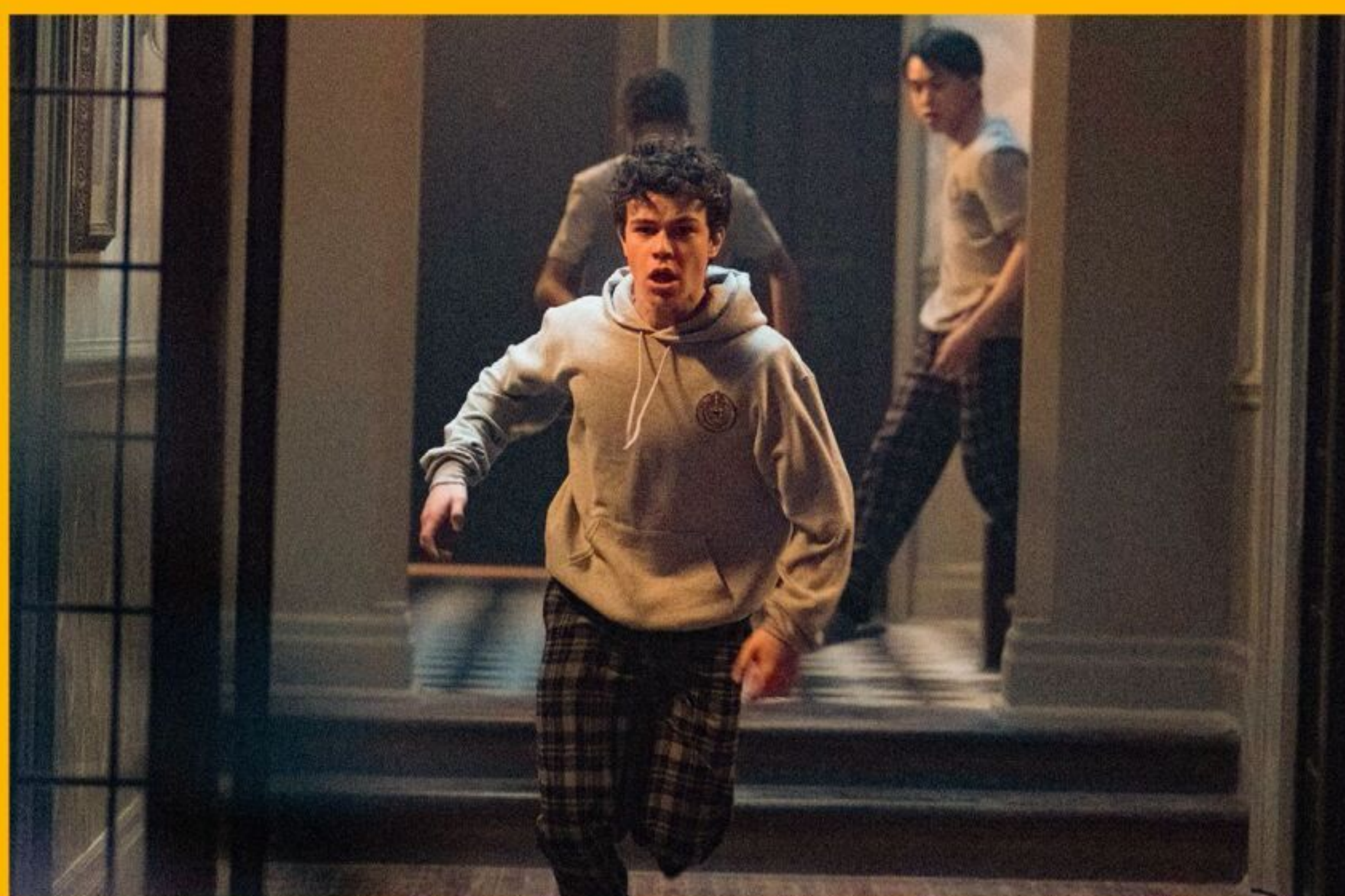
I guess a lot of people can relate to the fact that he was bullied. I remember a long time ago, when I was in elementary school, I sort of had a similar experience. I’d say he’s a little bit of a nerd. He’s a little bit of a geek. That’s definitely





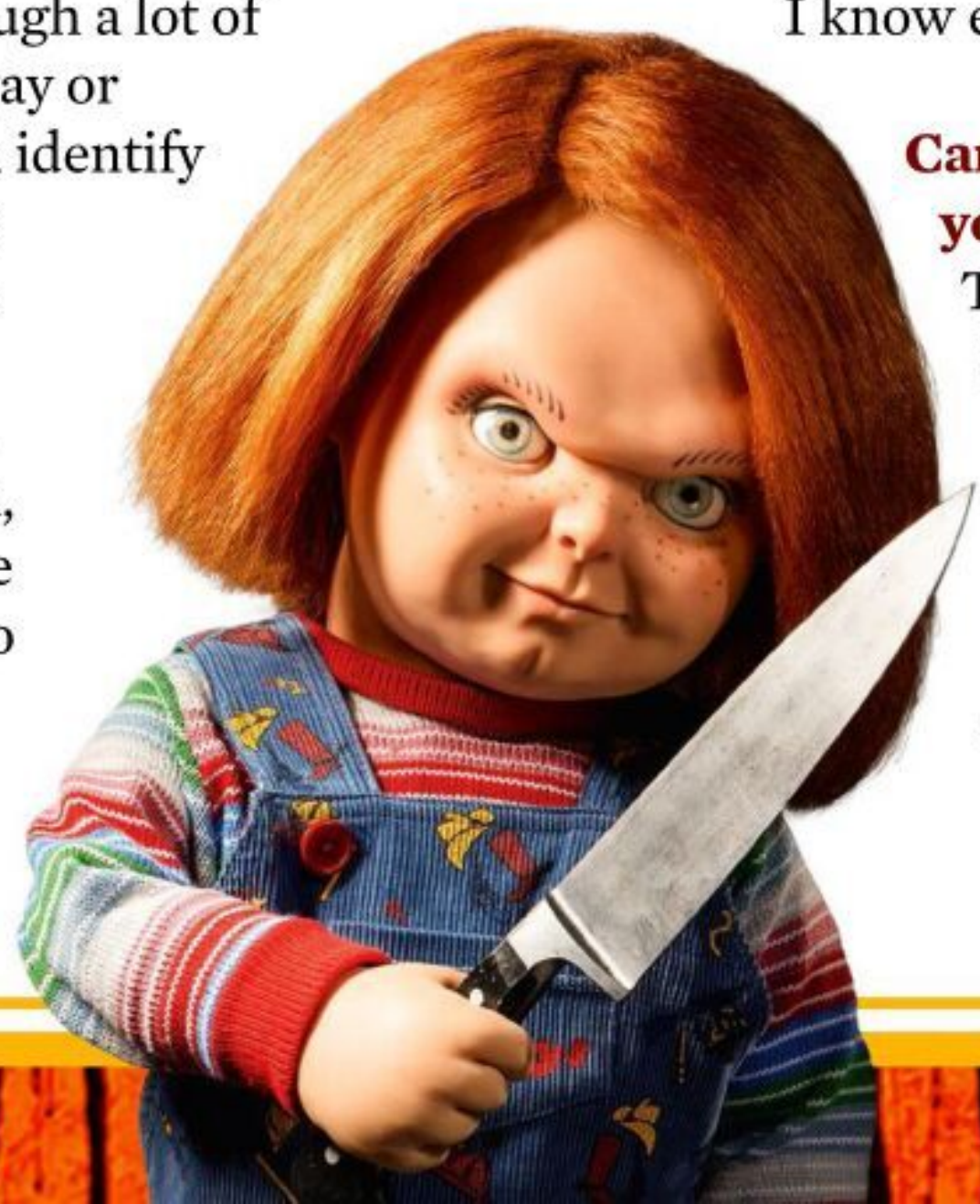


Lexy and Nadine aren't ecstatic, either.



How many times: no running in the corridors!

qualities that I have. I like making music in my spare time and I guess I would say I'm very enthusiastic about it to a point where I'm nerdy. So I guess we both have that shared quality. Jake goes through a lot of shit, you know? One way or another most of us can identify with him in some way. I think maybe that has something to do with how popular it's been. But this second season, you know, there's more shit with everybody. So get ready for that.



#### What geeky thing are you a fan of?

I have to say this one's a little embarrassing. Actually, no, it's not embarrassing. I'm gonna own it. I think I've seen *Lion King* about 60 to 70 times. I'm not even kidding you. I've seen that movie way too many times. And that is definitely my geek movie. I know every line, I know every song...

#### Can you remember the first time you met Chucky?

The first time I had to work with him was actually on the first day! I'm holding the doll at school, and I remember I picked it up for the first time and I just looked into his eyes and I was just like, "Oh my god". You would

think that seeing it, seeing how it works in real life, the puppeteers and stuff, that you wouldn't be scared of it, but he's freaky. The doll is all practical effects too. There's no CGI, it's all done right in front of you. They have the voice of Brad Dourif playing while you're in the scene, so it just feels like you're acting with another person. And it's really freaky. They set his voice up on a speaker and you hear it from somewhere in the room. So it's just like Brad Dourif's the voice of God coming down the middle of the scene.

#### This season has returning legacy characters such as Glen/Glenda...

Lachlan [Watson], they're sooo amazing. I met them in the hair trailer and they were just so nice, I think we talked for like, 40 minutes. We're always hanging out on set, and playing pool. It's funny, because we're always giving each other shit the whole time. It's kind of how we talk. And also, Bella Higginbotham, she's coming on this season [as Nadine] and she's great. We've all been hanging out on the weekends, and we've all got this strong relationship.

#### What's been the craziest thing you've done in season two?

There are a lot of stunts that I get to do this season. It's been really fun for me, because I love doing my own stunts. That's all I can really say! I'm actually filming today. And I was about to say what I was filming but I realised that that would be *really* big spoilers! This season, we've been upgraded. The writers really found a crazy way to end up this season. ●



# SPELL

THE SANDERSON SISTERS  
ARE FINALLY BACK  
IN THE LONG-AWAITED

HOCUS  
POCUS 2

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**





# BOUNDED

**F**OR A MOVIE THAT DIDN'T EXACTLY SET the box-office alight on its original release in 1993, *Hocus Pocus* has become a staple of the Halloween season, a cult classic and such a phenomenon that fans have finally been rewarded for their near 30-year pleas for a sequel.

That's right – they're back, witches. Lock up your children!

Producer Lynn Harris explains that many "extraordinary super fans" internally at Disney had a hand in finally getting the project off the ground. With their insistence that "this is important and you should pay attention", a first draft from yet another super fan, Jen D'Angelo, kicked things off around three years ago.

"We approached the women, and said, 'Hey, guys, it's time to get the band back together,'" Harris says. "They were all amenable and excited and had great notes on the script, which we took into account, because each of them has such a deep awareness of their character. Even though it had been 27 years, when we first started talking. They really remembered and understood who they were as Winnie, Sarah and Mary. They clicked right back into character, and it was magic." →



"It's a daunting task to take on something like this with the fandom, because you don't want to blow it," says director Anne Fletcher. "It is very scary, I've never done a sequel." So, she asked herself – apart from the key element of nostalgia – what could she bring to the film?

"The opening of our movie is a prologue to our young witches – and that is the reason I took the movie because I'm very, very much about backstories and truth and grounding," she explains. "Those are the things that I love the most – within the grounding you can be silly and stupid, and over the top and crazy. But now the fans get a little peek into the earlier years of our witches. Which to me is a blast. So I took the movie for that particular reason. The second reason is the first scare in the movie is so much fun..."

"We were very excited to introduce a little slice of the origin story of Winifred, Sarah and Mary Sanderson," Harris adds, "so that you understand a little bit of why they are so set on revenge. Why they are who they are, what happened to these women when they were little girls. That helps explain a little bit about who they are today."

"We want to broaden the audience out and introduce a whole new series of generations of viewers to the Sanderson Sisters and the world of *Hocus Pocus*."

Tone, Harris says, is a fine line on a movie like this. "It's one of the very few Halloween movies you can watch intergenerationally. Most Halloween movies either go into pure horror or very young, silly, goofy, nothing for adults. Anne has threaded that needle very beautifully with this movie, and she's satisfying fans as well as people who have never seen the first movie."

## WITCHMANIA

*Hocus Pocus 2* is a brand new story, not connected to the 2018 sequel novel. Teenage girls light the black flame candle, and the Sanderson Sisters return to wreak havoc at Salem ScareFest. And what's a show without a musical number? This time round it's Blondie's "One Way Or Another". "The three ladies being



as adept as they are, you almost couldn't not have musical numbers," Harris smiles.

"We got to shoot it fairly quickly," Fletcher laughs about the scene. "I don't think the witches would say it was quick. They had to do all the work, and one location was brutal to work in and the other one was freezing cold."

"It is truly as though they had not been out of costume for 27 years," Harris recalls. "They went right back into character. When I say character, not just their own individual character, but the way in which they relate to one another, which is very specific, in terms of the familial squabbles in birth order. Winnie very much being in charge, alternately annoyed by her sisters, loving her sisters, frustrated with her sisters. And that dynamic between the three of them was always hilarious and apparent immediately."

The production – under the name *Black Flame* – filmed in Providence, Rhode Island, standing in for Salem. "Our production designer Nelson Coates did a lot of research in Salem, both in the present day and in the 1600s to make sure that we were being

very true to what Salem would be like," Harris notes.

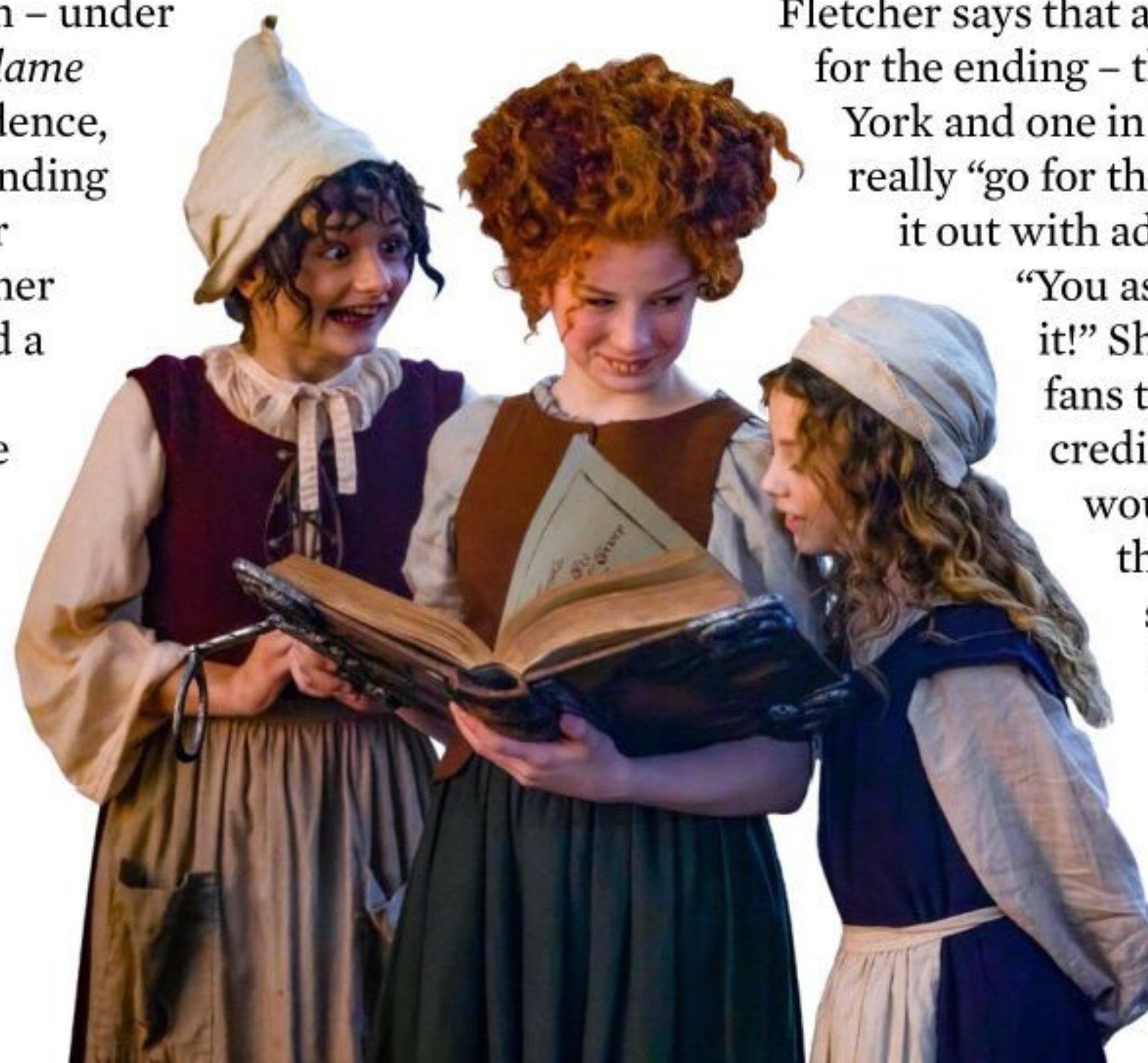
This kind of fan-service already hasn't gone unnoticed by *Hocus Pocus* aficionados. "We had a handful of previews with audiences and it works like gangbusters," Fletcher says, not wanting to "toot the movie's horn".

"We had great responses, like, enormous mind-blowing responses about this movie and truly they love the witches beyond comprehension. They were just champing at the bit with joy, pure and utter joy, to be immersed in their world again."

"The audiences lost their minds," she gasps. "Every time the witches enter the stage, it's as if the Beatles came to America for the first time. When Billy enters the movie, it's as if Elvis showed up, I don't understand it. It's like, what is happening?"

Fletcher says that additional pick-ups for the ending – three days in New York and one in LA – allowed her to really "go for the jugular" and build it out with add-ons. She laughs.

"You asked for it, you got it!" She also encourages fans to stay past the credits – as though they wouldn't – saying that there was something she always wanted to shoot but







They tried a Kindle, but it just wasn't the same.



Becca, Cassie and Izzy have caused a lot of trouble.



Sam Richardson as newbie Gilbert.

originally ran out of time for. The pick-ups provided the opportunity for something she calls a “final little treat...”

## ETERNAL FLAME

Alongside original cast Bette Midler, Sarah Jessica Parker and Kathy Najimy reprising their roles as the Sanderson Sisters, Doug Jones is also back as Billy Butcherson.

“You cannot have this movie without Billy,” Fletcher states. “I had a whole idea of what I wanted to do with the cat [Binx]. To this day, I’m still fighting. The movie is completely locked, but I’m still fighting for it. I wanted Dani because I feel like the heart and soul for me was Dani and the cat.

“That storyline in the first movie was the heart, when she has her speech: ‘I will take care of you and my children will take care of you and their children will take care of you’... like, sobs – me crying like a baby. It’s a powerful speech. So I wanted that relationship badly back on screen. We did talk with Thora [Birch, who played Dani] a couple times, but she ended

up getting an amazing job. So we tried and it just wasn’t gonna work out. So you go, ‘Okay, that wasn’t meant to be. Let’s figure out how to do this without her.’ But we have the cat, we have brand new characters, obviously. And we do in fact, have a tonne of Easter eggs in the movie. There’s fun little callbacks from the first movie.”

With the renewed love for the Sanderson sisters, will fans have to wait another three decades for more mischief?

“I have definitely kept it wide open for any sequel,” says Fletcher. “Now it’s really up to them if they want to do it. I can’t say anything other than yes, it is left open. Will they do it? I don’t know, they haven’t even talked about it, that I can be honest with you.”

“There’s always potential,” Harris suggests. “It’s a movie about magic and witches. Those things are timeless aren’t they? A multiverse of witches!”

For now, though Fletcher and Harris hope fans old and new find something that resonates in *Hocus Pocus 2*.

“The movie – or at least as it relates to Winifred’s arc and her relationship with her sisters – is quite emotional,” Harris says.

“Surprisingly emotional, I would say. There’s a lovely message about sisterhood in the movie.”

“Its overall theme really is sisterhood,” Fletcher agrees, “and having each other’s back and staying together – the power of three, the power of friendship, power of sisterhood. I know it sounds really cheeseball but what I like to do in my movies is bury the lesson – a lot of it is on the top and you can’t miss it, but then I bury a lot of things underneath.

“In the very first scene where we meet the witches, I really wanted to push the envelope a little bit further, I wanted to really push that in 40 years from the time of our opening, the

witch trials were happening. I’m looking at that going, the opening of the movie is a direct link to 2022 what women, girls are going through at this moment. Now, that part of the story is what’s baked into the pie. Let’s bury some truth in here, because it’s real.

“Women were killed because they had a voice. And we’re going there, right as you and I are speaking. There’s no question about it. So for this movie, I really wanted to bury some of the irony of 1600s to 2022 that yeah, we’re still going through this crap.”

While Fletcher states that this is a “very different movie” to the original, she hopes it brings joy. “Escape to that thing that you fell in love with that movie. Hopefully now in 2022, it brings you back to a happier time in the world, a happier time in your life that you continue in your Halloween tradition.

“I hope I was able to bring that essence and that nostalgia back, and the silliness and the joy that the witches bring us and a whole bunch of other treats that are in there.” ●

*Hocus Pocus 2 is on Disney+ from 30 September.*



And here’s how it all begins this time round.



QUANTUM LEAP

# LEAP OF

THE BELOVED '90S SCI-FI SERIES  
**QUANTUM LEAP**  
GETS A REVIVAL WITH A NEW LEAPER  
WORDS: TARA BENNETT

NBC, GETTY



# FAITH

**U**NDoubtedly, there was a lot of great, original sci-fi television birthed in the '90s and one of the best series to come from the period was *Quantum Leap*. The time-travel drama, created by Donald P. Bellisario, brilliantly fused a high-concept premise with a "mission of the week" format by having physicist Dr. Sam Beckett (Scott Bakula) "leap" through time into the lives of others to correct historical mistakes. And with every fix, Sam hoped the next leap would place him back into his own life and time. Poignant, clever and sometimes silly, *Quantum Leap* aired for five seasons, ending in 1993 with the bittersweet reveal that Sam never returned home.

Over the decades, there was talk of a *Quantum Leap* television movie and even a feature film, but nothing concrete happened until January of this year, when NBC picked up the series for an official revival which will continue where the mythology left off 29 years ago. Returning are original executive producers Bellisario and Deborah Pratt, who join new executive producers/showrunners, Steven Lilien, Bryan Wynbrandt and Martin Gero. To quote Sam: "Oh boy."

## LEAP SERVICE

Having grown into a beloved cult series consistently ranked in the top echelons of TV sci-fi, it's not a surprise that figuring out the right way to viably continue *Quantum Leap* took so long. Achieving that sweet-spot balance of smart sci-fi, historical scope, humour and wistful storytelling is no small feat.

But EP Martin Gero tells *SFX* that this revival's team of writers and producers bring with them a lot of love for the original and a zeal to do right by the show that came before. "The show that Don and Deborah made, and conceived of, is so special," he enthuses. "To just throw it out and start it from scratch seemed insane."

As a teen, Gero says he watched the show when it originally aired, and episodes like the JFK ones in season five stayed with him into his own writing career as a classic example of great storytelling with an amazing twist ending. "There's so many episodes that are in all of our DNA if you're of a certain age," he says fondly. "It was a property I certainly had an enormous amount of admiration for, and so when they asked if I was interested in →

Ernie Hudson  
as Herbert and  
Raymond Lee  
as Dr. Ben.



being involved, it was zero hesitation. I said, 'Sign me up! What can I do to help? Let's get the show back on the air.'"

As a fan, Gero says that the series finale "Mirror Image", where Sam chose to correct the fate of his best friend Al's (Dean Stockwell) marriage and never leaps home, haunted him. "The original ending had intent on their side," Gero agrees. "But as a fan, it's like, 'Oh, no! He's still out there?' It felt unfinished, so the ability to continue a story that I think so many people are desperate to continue is really exciting."

## TIME BARRIER

When the new series opens, Project Quantum Leap is put back online in 2022 after being shut down years ago. There's a new team, with new technology to facilitate jumping, and a new time traveller in physicist Dr Ben Seong (Raymond Lee). Gero says the pilot gets both old and new audiences up to speed about PQL, its original mission and its new one. "As a group, we found a way that makes sense that this [programme] would be happening right now. We explain it in the pilot right away and you'll continue to understand why the programme was shut down initially, and then restarted. All of that stuff feels very organic and good."

"It was a way of continuing the story while respecting the old show. But it was an opportunity for us to do something totally our own," Gero says about the story engine for this series. "It also works because the majority of younger viewers might have an awareness of the title, because it's one of those iconic television names with an opening saga sell that is one of the most famous minutes of television, but that's it. We wanted to make it so that they didn't feel like, 'Oh shit. Do I have to watch 90-something episodes of television to watch the first episode of this?'"

"No, the barrier to entry is so low," he reiterates. "It will definitely be a fuller experience if you've seen the show, but it's a rad experience even if you haven't."

As in the original series, the pilot episode lays out how Ben finds himself leaping through time to correct historical mistakes. "The mystery of the show is that he leaves very suddenly, without telling even the people closest to him that he's doing it," Gero says. "And then when he lands, like the original, he doesn't have the full picture. His memory is kind of like Swiss cheese. So part of the big mystery of the first season of the show is answering, why did Ben do it and what happened next?"

Gero says they were aware from the start that audiences falling in love with the concept again is very much contingent on them investing in Ben and his travels through time. "Ben has a tremendous amount of humanity and empathy, which is what this show is

about," he says. "And it's impossible to talk about Ben without talking about Ray because the two have become so intertwined. Ray is such a compassionate performer and such a likeable guy," he enthuses.

"For this to work, he's a character that needs to be a bit of a social chameleon and have the ability to blend in everywhere while still being authentically himself. We're shooting our third episode right now and watching him inhabit so many of these characters, it's so exciting to think about what we're going next with him."

That begs the question, do the parameters and rules of Sam's time adventures still apply to how Ben is going to do it? Does he have a new hologram buddy, like Al, to help him figure out his next course of action, and is there a new Ziggy to calculate the probabilities of his success?

"We are honouring the rules of the first show, but we are bending them, and justifying them when we do," Gero explains. "It's very important to us that when we do something that was not set up in the original show we explain why. And there's a very good explanation for it right at the top of the first episode."

He does confirm that Ben will eventually be able to jump past his own lifetime in this series. "But he's still very much jumping into people who are either in crisis, or adjacent to someone who's about to be in crisis. And trying to help their lives in a meaningful way. That's still a big part of it. To leave, he's got to help people."

## LONG DISTANCE

Ben will have his own AI, but it's a her this time around. Addison (Caitlin Bassett) is in charge of Project Quantum Leap, and is Ben's fiancée. "What's really fun is in this version they have a pre-existing relationship. They were in love," Gero says of the big change-up from the original. "He doesn't necessarily remember it at first. But this is a grand love story, plus the worst long-distance relationship ever!"

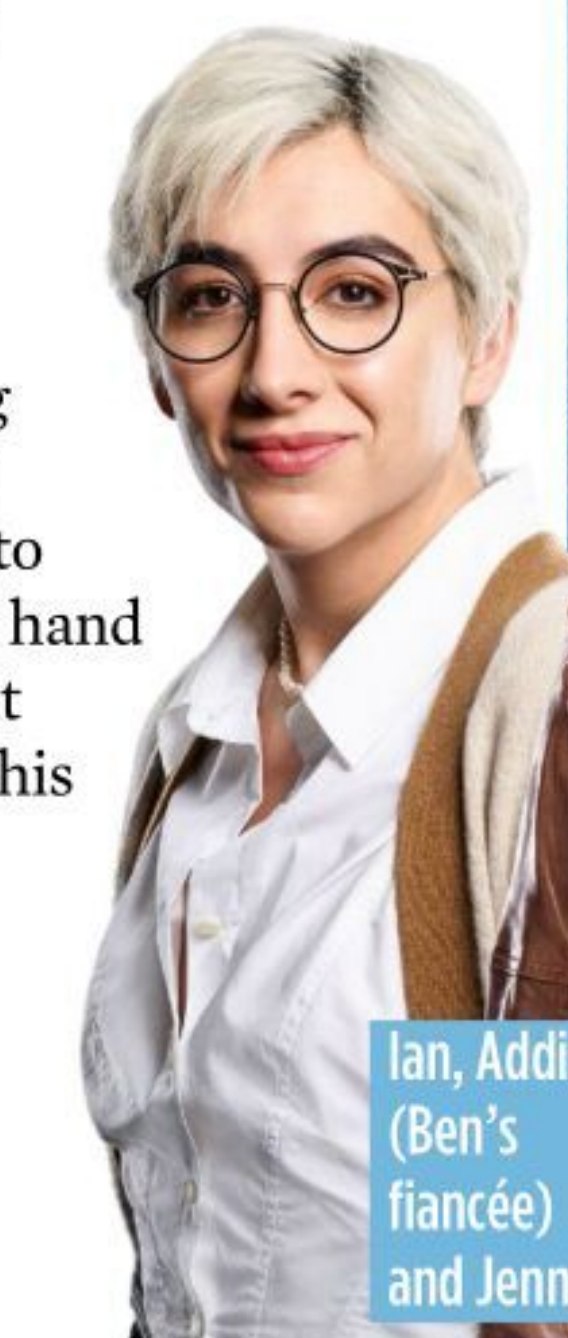
"They're so close. They can see each other but his hand goes right through her and vice versa. It's really beautiful and heartbreaking in moments. But also, really optimistic in some places. It's a fascinating dynamic. They are separated through time, and are trying to deal not only with the task at hand for the greater mythology, but also figuring out, what does this do to our relationship?" Gero adds.

"It brings a complexity to their relationship that the original show never needed, or wanted. And it's a way to differentiate ourselves,



Dean Stockwell and Scott Bakula in the original.

"We are honouring the rules of the first show, but we are bending them"



Ian, Addison (Ben's fiancée) and Jenn.





We meet the new team in the pilot episode.



"Something's gone wrong... I'm outta here."

because the chemistry that Sam and Al had, you can't duplicate that, so we're not even going to try. We're making it a very different thing that I think is still super-entertaining and awesome, but just different."

There will also be a slightly different handheld calculator/communicator that Addison uses, similar to the device Al used to keep in contact with Ziggy. "Obviously, our Ziggy's got the 2022 upgrade, but it's still a presence in the show," Gero explains. "It's tasked with trying to predict what they're there for, and what they're there to do. So Ziggy is still around, but you get to actually see Ziggy."

This series will also have stories set in 2022 with the team members trying to get Ben back. "You get to see Addison, and you get to see the whole Quantum Leap team and the Quantum Leap headquarters," he reveals.

"You get to meet all of these incredible characters back there that are not only helping out with the 'leap of the week', but we've also tied this mystery through the first season about what's going on. Why did Ben jump? Why now? Who's helping him? I think that story won't alienate the casual viewer, but it will super-reward the consistent viewer."

#### BAKULA TO THE FUTURE?

And what about Sam Beckett? Will this *Quantum Leap* address where he is, or make it a goal to bring him back? "It'll definitely be addressed," Gero says. "Sam Beckett is a mythological figure to the show, obviously, because it's a continuation of the original. As far as if we will cross paths with Sam Beckett, it's something we would love to do. But it's also contingent on how Scott [Bakula] feels about the show and what Scott wants to do. We would love to have him on, but this show works either way right now."

Gero says that right now they're spending their time finding stories worth telling every week, just like the original series. "What's fun about this show is we not only get to jump through history, but we get to jump through genres," he enthuses. "We want people to turn on the show and have a great escapist hour and an enormous amount of fun. We want to keep them guessing as to what type of episode is going to come next."


"There are going to be some that are like a blockbuster action movie; huge and exciting where the stakes are really high. And then there's some that are smaller and more emotional, potentially about a social issue that feels very organic to who Ben has jumped into. Also, we're trying to texturally make sure that we're not repeating ourselves. Absolutely, we'll be in the '80s and '90s, but also the '70s. And even further back, and it's really fun." ●

*Quantum Leap* is on NBC from 19 September. UK details are TBC.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS:  
THE RINGS OF POWER

# PEOPLE OF MI



SFX MEETS THE  
DWARF, HARFOOT,  
ELF AND HUMAN  
STARS OF AMAZON'S  
MEGA-BUDGET  
TAKE ON TOLKIEN,  
**THE LORD  
OF THE  
RINGS: THE  
RINGS OF  
POWER**

WORDS: **RICHARD EDWARDS**



# MIDDLE-EARTH

## THE DWARVES

Owain Arthur as Durin IV  
and Sophia Nomvete as Disa

**What can you tell us about Durin and Disa?**

◆ **Owain Arthur:** Durin IV is a prince, a son and a father, and we come across him during the golden age of Khazad-dûm in Middle-earth. Life is good. He's a very happy, proud, loving, passionate – and stubborn – Dwarf.

◆ **Sophia Nomvete:** Disa is the first female Dwarf that we will ever see – what an honour it is to play wonderful, beautiful Disa. She's a powerhouse and a force of nature who cares so much about her home and her people, and also possesses some incredible magical powers as well. She stands alongside lovely Durin to work for the best possible outcomes for Khazad-dûm.

**How does Durin feel about being heir to the throne?**

◆ **Arthur:** There are the pressures you might expect – the expectation of what my father wants me to be, what I feel is my duty, what I should do, what I shouldn't do... Do I follow with tradition or do I think out of the box? The prospect of becoming king is a pressure on Durin, but he is actually looking forward to it.

◆ **Nomvete:** I think Disa sees this as an opportunity to change the direction of politics and the people of Khazad-dûm. She wants a sense of freedom, and she absolutely wants the best for her people and for her husband. She is just rooting to take this moment by the horns, and to use all the power that they will inevitably have for good.

**What we've seen of Khazad-dûm so far looks incredible. What was it like to turn up for work there?**

◆ **Nomvete:** It was unbelievable, because we know, having watched the films and done the research, how Khazad-dûm has been seen before, which was, of course, like a tomb [as the Mines of Moria in *The Lord Of The Rings*]. But when we walked onto the set for the first time, it was alive, in colour, with gold and meticulous angles. You could see the veins in the stone!

◆ **Arthur:** You had to touch it to work out if it was real stone or not. What's great is that part of the design was also about thinking, "How do you build this stuff without electricity? How do you light this place?" So there were open flames, which had its challenges as well – very hot! – and then they were thinking about how you can bounce daylight into a mine that's half a mile deep. It was very impressive indeed. →

GETTY (3)



Markella  
Kavenagh  
as Nori  
Brandyfoot.

## THE HARFOOTS

### Markella Kavenagh as Nori Brandyfoot and Megan Richards as Poppy Proud fellow

**Harfoots bear quite a resemblance to Hobbits. What's the difference?**

◆ **Markella Kavenagh:** Physically they look quite similar – as in they have the same feet, they have the ears – but I think the main difference lies in their circumstances. When we meet the Hobbits they have the Shire, they have a home, but the Harfoots are still very much in the process of finding that for themselves.

◆ **Megan Richards:** They're definitely searching for a home. They have these carts, which are where they keep all their belongings and are what they sleep in. The Harfoots travel and move through the seasons, through nature, carrying their homes on their backs. But they do have that strong sense of community that the Hobbits do, so there are definitely elements that trickle through.

**What can you tell us about Nori and Poppy?**

◆ **Kavenagh:** Nori's a very resolute, inquisitive, curious Harfoot. She's attempting to balance her dedication to family and the responsibilities she carries with an interest in adventure – and sometimes that gets her into a bit of trouble. She just feels like sometimes the Harfoot community needs to stop and subvert tradition a bit to see what they could be if they just took a risk every now and then.

◆ **Richards:** Poppy is funny and loving, and sort of like a bouncing ball of fun. But she's also very cautious and observant, especially in comparison to Nori. She's so loyal, and she has so much love for her friend – she really is there by her side, and you really see that throughout the whole series.

**The Lord Of The Rings famously features species of different sizes. How did you find it when shooting at different scales?**

◆ **Richards:** All of the cast went through something called "Scale Academy". It was a couple of hours, and it was a PowerPoint presentation led by the VFX team. They were great and they were trying to talk to us about the technology and how advanced it is now – I still don't understand it, it's just insane!

There was a lot of standing on apple boxes or digging holes in the ground, and they would build trees that would make us look smaller or give us props that were larger than us. We also had scale doubles – sometimes they'd be used if it was a wide shot using natural New Zealand landscapes.



Megan  
Richards  
as Poppy  
Proud fellow.





Ismael Cruz  
Córdova  
as the Elf  
Arondir.

## THE ROMEO AND JULIET

Nazanin Boniadi  
as Bronwyn and  
Ismael Cruz Córdova  
as Arondir

**Bronwyn and Arondir don't appear in Tolkien's books. Tell us about them...**

◆ **Nazanin Boniadi:** Bronwyn is a Southlander, so her ancestors chose the wrong side of history. They chose the side of evil, and they were banished to barren lands where they had to restart and rebuild. They're still trying to earn the trust of the good guys, and the Elves are watching over them, so they feel like the underdogs. She's a healer, and a single mother of a rebellious teenage son, and in the meantime, she's in a forbidden love [affair] with a Silvan Elf called Arondir.

◆ **Ismael Cruz Córdova:** Arondir is a soldier stationed in the Southlands watching over those bad, bad Humans [laughs], keeping them on track. He's a quiet warrior, a ferocious but stoic being, but he's different to the other Elves there. He's quite curious towards the Humans, and questioning why the Elves are there. That curiosity leads him to meet and fall in love with a Human, Bronwyn.

**We know their relationship is frowned upon. What draws them together?**

◆ **Córdova:** They're both disruptive in their own way – dissonant voices within their own communities – and they're both leaders, people who have had to make their own way. I think they both share this curiosity for the Other, and I think that brings them closer and closer.

◆ **Boniadi:** I love the fact that you look at them, and they're so different in movement and race, in background and everything. You have an Elf and a Human who are a very unlikely couple, but that's all overcome by their similarities. You think an Elf and a Human are never going to fall in love, but they're bonded by these similar traits they have, a love for something better that drives them to improve things.

**Everybody has preconceptions about famous characters like Galadriel and Elrond. Is it liberating that we know nothing about Bronwyn and Arondir?**

◆ **Córdova:** It's exciting and it's freeing, because there's just possibility. You need that to offset things that are already set in the writing, and the characters where we know how they're going to end up.

◆ **Boniadi:** I think the beauty of the show is it draws from what's familiar, but it also introduces this newness that only enhances the story. →



Nazanin  
Boniadi  
as Bronwyn,  
a Human.



## THE ELVES

### Morfydd Clark as Galadriel, Robert Aramayo as Elrond and Ben Walker as Gil-galad

**Galadriel and Elrond are Middle-earth celebrities but Gil-galad only appears for a few seconds in flashback in Peter Jackson's *The Lord Of The Rings*. What do we need to know about him?**

◆ **Ben Walker:** He's king of the Elves! Gil-galad is the longest reigning king of the Noldor [a race of High Elves], and that pretty much sums it up. He's lived through peace, he's lived through war, and because he's an Elf he has this breadth of understanding of time, the inevitable rise of evil and how to prepare for it.

**Will the show reveal a different side to the Elves? From what we've seen, this Galadriel is much more of an action hero than the Cate Blanchett incarnation.**

◆ **Morfydd Clark:** Delving into *The Silmarillion* and *The Unfinished Tales*, I learned so much about her that I didn't know. Obviously she's been alive for a long, long time, and this was a version of her I wasn't aware of. I find it such a gift to be able to learn all these physical skills, which I found really helpful in making me feel like a warrior Elf.

**Does knowing that you're playing an immortal being affect how you tackle the role?**

◆ **Walker:** Very much so. I mean, you have to stretch your imagination to the point where everyone you've known and loved has died over and over and over again – and then they have to muster the strength to have hope, especially this particular group of Elves who have chosen to stay behind to protect Middle-earth. It's one of the reasons I love the Elves so much.

◆ **Robert Aramayo:** Elrond had a really important choice to make – he chose to be immortal, while his brother chose to be mortal. That's something that is so unique, because he's seen his own blood decay and die. I thought that was a really interesting thing, because it must be quite confusing for someone who's immortal to see the ways in which a mortal body ages.

◆ **Clark:** I think the thing that sets Galadriel a bit apart from the other Elves at the moment – which is a source of lots of her inner turmoil – is that she does have a sense of time, more so than everyone else. That means she is rushing, in a way that I don't think the Elves generally do. That's taxing for her.

**How much did you explore the works of JRR Tolkien before making the show?**

◆ **Clark:** We all delved into it. Some of us were better at it than others, and Rob [Aramayo] was the best. Whenever I was confused about something, I'd be like, "Rob, I've read this, but it still doesn't make sense to me!" That was really fun, actually, because I felt like I was going back to school in a way – but really wanting to learn.

◆ **Aramayo:** There's certain things in Tolkien where you first read it, and you're like, "Why does Morgoth have five names?" There are different names for the same thing, and the names seem to change in the writing of it. But there are lots of things that happen like that in the real world, and Tolkien extrapolated them into these really great ideas. They just add some texture to his story. It goes so deep, and you can journey into it as far as you want – and keep going!



Morfydd Clark  
as Galadriel,  
having a  
lovely bath.



Robert  
Aramayo as  
Elrond, having  
a lovely sit.



Ben Walker  
as Gil-galad,  
not having a  
lovely stand.





The gang's all here in a Human family portrait.

## THE HUMANS

### Lloyd Owen as Elendil, Maxim Baldry as Isildur, Ema Horvath as Eärien and Charlie Vickers as Halbrand

**The Rings Of Power will give us our first glimpse of Númenor, home to the greatest Human civilisation in Middle-earth. What can we expect to see?**

◆ **Charlie Vickers:** Númenor is almost like Tolkien's version of Atlantis, and it's a massive part of his work that's never been explored on screen before. You get to see amazing mariners and sailors.

◆ **Lloyd Owen:** The Númenor set is like Santorini, Marrakesh or ancient Greece, and it goes on forever – even in the bits we didn't shoot in.

◆ **Ema Horvath:** I spent a lot of time with Daniel Reeve – he created Bilbo Baggins's handwriting, and he created the Númenórean alphabet, which has never been seen before. I was the only cast member who knew how to write it, and when I went onto the Númenor set, there was this tiny little alleyway where they'd carved Elvish into the wall. Then, over it, they'd graffitied Númenórean, and no one else had noticed it. Who knows if it's in shot in the show at all – but they did it!

**Can you give us a quick bio for your characters, please?**

◆ **Vickers:** Halbrand is a man who has reached a sort of crossroads in his life. He's from the Southlands, so he is in a part of Middle-earth

which is quite poor. He has a complicated relationship with Elves, and basically I think he gets to a point where he's like, "I don't want to live my old life any more, I want to start afresh." We end up meeting him in the middle of the Sundering Seas, then he meets someone who pushes him in one direction and he wants to go in the other...

◆ **Owen:** Elendil is the father to Eärien, Isildur and Anárion, who's also written about in Tolkien's legendarium, but he's [currently] elsewhere, a force outside of our current family. Elendil is a very capable mariner and a widower, so he's dealing with the loss of his wife, trying to be a single father to these grieving adult children. He then gets drawn into some of the politics of Númenor. There's a schism in society that's also being reflected in the family itself, because there are differing views among us as to which way Númenor should go.

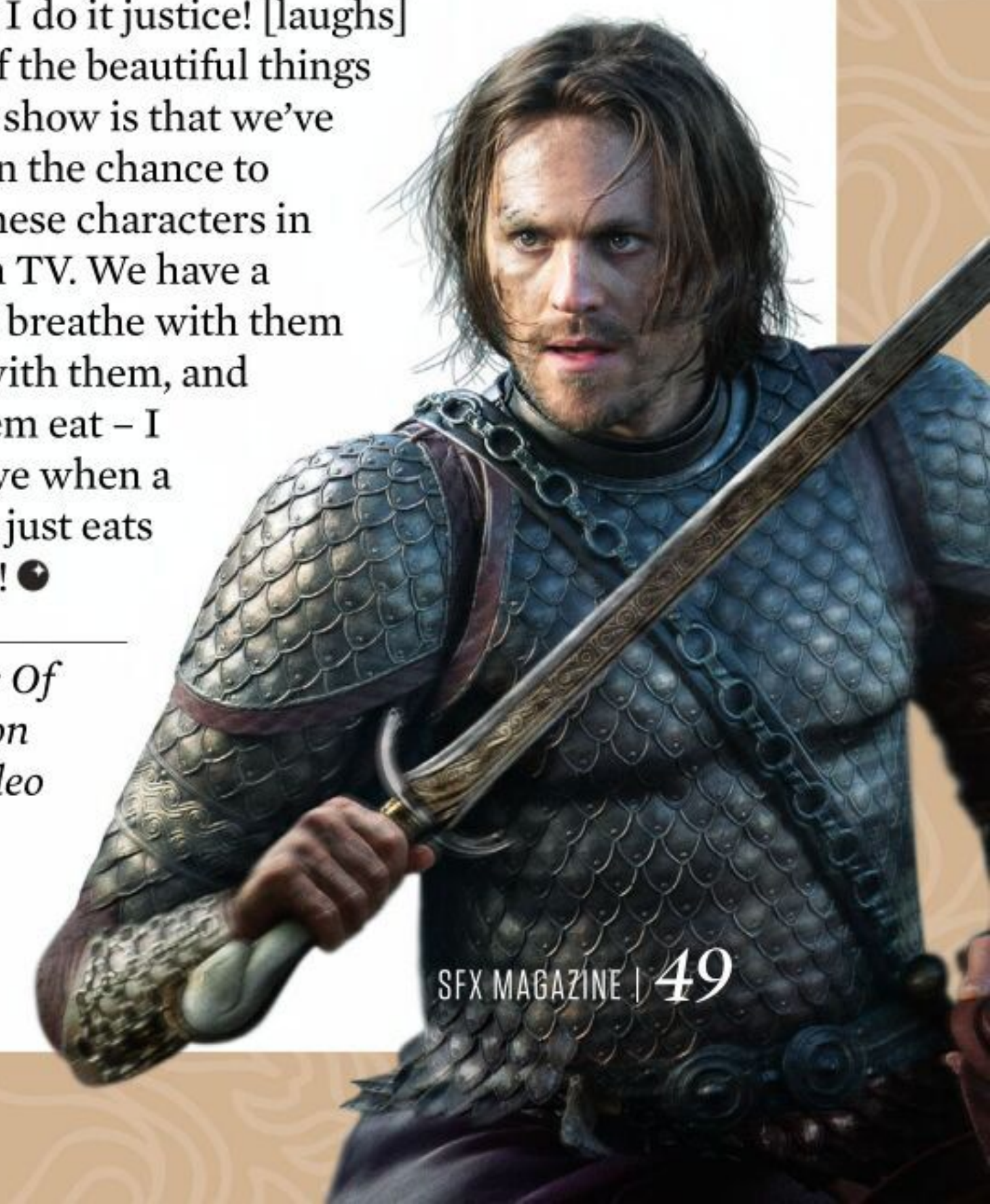
◆ **Horvath:** Eärien is the baby of the family and she's a bit overlooked. She's dealt with so much loss in her life, and she's trying to be a mother figure in the absence of their mum. She's an aspiring architect, and also has political ambitions bubbling underneath the surface. She believes strongly in Númenor and in authority, which is the polar opposite to the philosophy of her brother and her father.

◆ **Maxim Baldry:** Isildur is a young sailor who's wanting to pursue the footsteps of his father – or at least his father wants him to pursue his footsteps. He's struggling to decide what he wants to do and he makes mistakes along the way, leaving a bit of a path of destruction with some of his decisions.

**We know that Isildur has quite the destiny, tied up in the fate of the One Ring... How did that affect you?**

◆ **Baldry:** It's hard to get up in the mornings from the weight of the expectation, so hopefully I do it justice! [laughs] But one of the beautiful things about the show is that we've been given the chance to explore these characters in long-form TV. We have a chance to breathe with them and live with them, and watch them eat – I always love when a character just eats on screen! ●

*The Rings Of Power is on Prime Video now.*





FATE: THE WINX SAGA

# Fairy Tales

AS *Fate: The Winx Saga*  
RETURNS FOR ANOTHER SERIES, SFX JOINS THE CAST  
AND CREW ON-SET IN IRELAND TO FIND OUT  
HOW THIS SECOND SEASON IS “BIGGER AND BETTER”

WORDS: STEVE O'BRIEN







Hannah van der Westhuysen as Stella (front).



Abigail Cowen as Bloom, making an entrance.



**A**S *SFX* ARRIVES IN THE grounds of Killruddery Estate, a vast, 800-acre mansion 12 miles from Dublin, it's clear it ain't a normal day here. A throng of tough-looking stunt performers are

brawling with swords to our left, while to our right we spot a familiar flame-haired figure sitting, wrapped in a fisherman's jumper and tweed jacket and cradling a Red Bull.

Abigail Cowen is, along with the rest of the cast and crew of Netflix's *Fate: The Winx Saga*, a week away from wrapping and, for her at least, today is all about her character Bloom's reunion with someone we thought we wouldn't be seeing again, when she was spectacularly offed by the dastardly Rosalind (Lesley Sharp last time out, Miranda Richardson this time round) in the closing moments of season one.

Except actor Eve Best isn't here for her phantasmal resurrection as Alfea school of magic's steely headmistress Farah Dowling. Today, it's a stand-in that Cowen is working alongside, with Best's pre-recorded lines being pumped through a speaker (she will, we're reliably informed, be edited in later). As Cowen and Dowling's surrogate saunter through the grass, the younger actor trips up. Cut! "Sorry!" she laughs, before stamping on the offending mound of earth.

It's 1 November here in County Wicklow, and a nippy eight degrees, but it's clear that autumn – and the occasional burst of drizzle – doesn't exist in Winx-land. There's even a man here whose job it is to scurry round collecting the dead leaves in a giant bin-bag, while the other female actors are hiding their super-chic summer fashions under puffer jackets and wellies. "I think people would be surprised to learn that it's so cold and we look like we're warm," Cowen tells us, between takes. "Season one was freezing cold. This has been better though, because we started in summer."

### POWER STRUGGLE

That first season of *Fate: The Winx Saga* debuted on Netflix in January 2021. A live-action reimaging of Nickelodeon's long-running *Winx Club* cartoon, it wasn't, first time round at least, a frontline series for the streamer, yet there's no sign today that they've gone into this second season at anything less than full throttle. This is TV production on a truly feature-film scale, which is only fitting considering where we left the series. "There's a war on the horizon," Rosalind told

Dowling just before snapping her neck. "The Burned Ones are nothing compared to what's coming." Oof.

Showrunner Brian Young knows something about working on big-budget YA shows. A veteran of *The Vampire Diaries*, he has characterised that first series of *Fate* as the one that explored the question "Who am I?". When we first met fire fairy Bloom at the beginning of that season, she was attempting to work out her place in the world. By its end she'd discovered that she was a changeling – a fairy who'd been sent to the First World as a baby, where she was swapped with a human child and raised as, well, a muggle, to borrow another franchise's term.

"I always try and think of what's a question that people this age will be asking themselves?" Young tells *SFX*, as we shelter from the cold in the estate's spacious greenhouse. "Season two, the question we talked about was, 'What am I going to be when I grow up?' When you're at this age, you're starting to figure out, what does my life look like when I'm out of this school environment, when I'm out into the world? And for these fairies, what does their life look like with these powers?"

"For Bloom, specifically, she has this thing which she comes to learn over the course of the second season, that she has this really special thing inside of her, so what does that mean for her life? The idea that she's going to be an artist or an engineer is not a reality any more, because she has this massive power inside of her and has a bigger destiny. How do you wrestle with that when you had a more normalised idea for what your life was gonna be? I think that's part of the journey everyone on the show is going to have in season two."

"At the beginning of this season, Bloom

is kind of coming into herself," says Cowen, who came to *Fate* off the back of a recurring role in the similarly teen-skewed *Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina*. "She's more confident, but maybe a little too confident, kind of cocky. And then in the middle and towards the end [of the season] she kinda falls flat on her face and realises that she's not as much in control as she thought. So it's a big learning experience for her. Towards the end, I think there's more of a balance and a peace within her about her powers."

"In season one, Bloom was asking, 'What is my backstory?'" Young adds. "In season two, she starts the season realising the sacrifices and the actions that she took had some pretty

**“This year you're coming into something kind of fascist”**

disastrous consequences for her and her friends. So there is a resistance, I think, at the beginning of season two, where Bloom is a little bit worried about the answers that she would find if she continues looking. As our mythology expands, the core of who Bloom is is going to be important to that. And obviously, that's going to be something that she still has to figure out. We'll answer some questions in season two, but there'll be more questions for season three."

A big change for this second season is that Queen Luna (played with icy relish by Kate Fleetwood) and her army of jackboots are now in charge of Alfea. If there was a criticism often made of series one, it was that things were maybe a bit too cosy; that it was a bit cookie-







Terra (Eliot Salt) and friend get into trouble.

Andreas (Ken Duken) gets his collar felt. Literally.

cutter about those high school scenes. Looking around at the sheer number of mean, paramilitary gear-clad extras here today, that's not a brickbat anyone's likely to throw at this second season.

"In series one, it was a little bit more like you would expect from a school environment," says Eliot Salt, who plays the socially awkward earth fairy Terra. "This year you're coming into something very terrifying and it's very military and kind of fascist, the energy. The uniforms are a lot more severe and there are armed guards everywhere."

So what of that skirmish we were watching being rehearsed outside, where a gaggle of stunt performers were clanking their swords in what looked like an epic battle for the heart of Alfea? "That's a big battle that's going to film later today," confides Young, his face beaming at the sheer budget-busting ambition of what he has planned for this season.

"Our new villains are the Blood Witches and, just to give a little bit of context, one of their powers is their ability to take over the minds of our characters. So some of our Specialists [the school's non-magical, sword-wielding pupils] are fighting their friends and their allies who

have been taken over, as well as the Blood Witches themselves. It's super exciting. David Moore, who's our block three director, is a genius. In Covid times, it's difficult to rally as many extras as you would normally be able to rally, but with some VFX help and with some clever filming we're able to fill out our world."

That's for today, but what of *Fate: The Winx Saga's* future? With 208 episodes of *Winx Club* to draw

from, not to mention a plethora of spin-offs including *PopPixie* and *World Of Winx*, Young and his writers have much to draw on.

"It's kind of an embarrassment of riches, just in terms of the amount of mythology that the original source material has," Young says. "For us, it's really about trying to figure out what part of that fits into a YA world. But I think the tricky thing with any Young Adult show is how do we maintain this bubble that they exist in? For me, part of the DNA of the series is them all together. But obviously, we're all creative people and we can come up with ways to keep them in each other's orbit."

For the moment, Young is just keen for fans to savour *this* season, which he stresses is much bigger and much more emotionally charged than the first. "Knowing that it was going to be bigger, we've had more second unit days, more VFX, more everything, to be completely honest," he smiles proudly. "The benefit of a season two show is that if season one is successful, it gives you the ability to expand all the things that made season one great!" ●

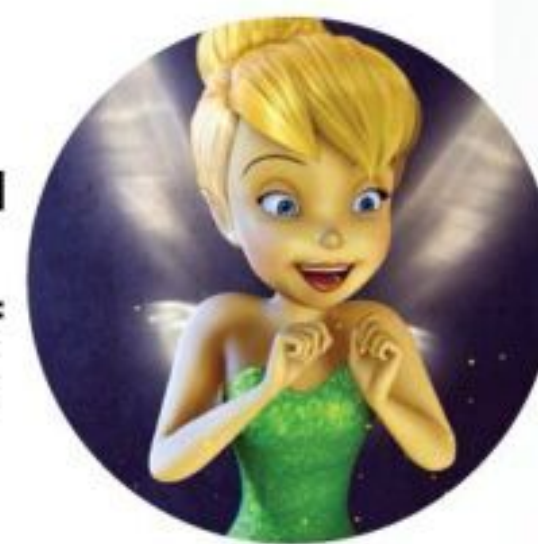
*Fate: The Winx Saga* is on Netflix from 26 September.

## Wing Team

Five iconic fairies from the big screen

### Tinker Bell (Peter Pan)

The most iconic fairy of all, whose fame has transcended the original 1904 story, Tinker Bell has been spun off countless times into her own movies, including 2008's *Tinker Bell*, the first of the Mouse House's Disney Fairies franchise. Imagine if the Disney Shop ran out of outfits...



### The Green Fairy

(Moulin Rouge!)

She may only feature in Baz Luhrmann's cosmically camp musical for less than a minute, but Kylie Minogue's cameo as the green fairy is one of the most memorable moments in a film stuffed with them. Her rendition of "The Sound Of Music", which starts off angelic before becoming increasingly sultry, is priceless.



### Cherlindrea (Willow)

Time will tell whether "the lally maiden of the forest" from Ron Howard's 1988 movie will be making a return in Disney+'s forthcoming revival. Played by Swedish actress Maria Holvöe, Cherlindrea was the fairy queen who bestows Willow with her wand and sends him off to find Fin Raziel.



### The Fairy Godmother

(Cinderella)

In *Cinderella*, the fairy godmother blesses our titular hero with a stunning dress, glass slippers and, of course, a carriage made from a pumpkin. As fairies go, she's the top dog, able to transform anything and everything, such as changing rats and lizards into coachmen.



### Tooth Fairies (Hellboy 2: The Golden Army)

Most fictional fairies tend to be graceful, peaceful and celestially beautiful. Not so the Tooth Fairies from Guillermo del Toro's *Hellboy* sequel. These vicious little critters are kinda what you'd get if you crossed Tinker Bell with a piranha. The fairies of del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* were less fright-inducing.





# ALONG CAME

# SPIDER-MAN

AS **SPIDER-MAN** CELEBRATES HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY,  
SFX CRAWLS THE WALLS OF COMIC BOOK HISTORY

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

**J**UST WHO IS THIS WEIRD FIGURE swinging through the shadows of a city skyline? There's no hint of a face and the eyes are blank, almost alien in shape. Wait – are those actual cobwebs clinging to his armpits?

He's a hero, right? Only a hero gets their own comic book cover. But this is the final issue of an anthology title, so all bets are off. And previous covers have showcased such existential threats as the Living Statues and The Terror of Tim Boo Ba while asking the eternally pressing question "Do Sinister Creatures Walk Among Us... In Human Form?"

If he is a hero, shouldn't he be clutching a swooning damsel, not some craggy average Joe who's clearly not

enjoying the ride? "Though the world may mock Peter Parker, the timid teenager... it will soon marvel at the awesome might of Spider-Man!" declares the masked oddity. Consider the cadence of those speech balloons. These are the vain, planet-threatening boasts of a supervillain, surely?

No wonder that average Joe looks terrified. He's just been told this freak's secret identity, which makes him a liability. How long before he succumbs to the venomous fangs of the malevolent man-spider?

If first impressions count for anything it's a miracle this character became one of the biggest pop-culture icons on Earth. But that's how the world met Spider-Man, on the cover of August 1962's *Amazing Fantasy* 15.





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Stan Lee was looking to build on the popularity of the Fantastic Four and the Incredible Hulk, collaborations with artist Jack Kirby that had launched the fast-forming Marvel universe. “Just for kicks I wanted to try something different,” he recalled, keen to prick the received wisdom that “teenagers only worked in humour comics or as sidekicks.” Marvel had teen protagonists already – Johnny Storm in Fantastic Four, Rick Jones in The Incredible Hulk – but one was a team player and bratty foil to older characters, the other a walking conscience to a big green bruiser with rage issues.

Lee was determined that this new, superpowered adolescent wouldn’t share the spotlight with anyone. It was a creative choice that left publisher Martin Goodman →

© MARVEL



uneasy – and he was equally skittish when it came to the iconography: “People don’t like spiders!” Goodman protested, fearing a sales disaster as arachnophobes shunned the newsstands. Lee later claimed he was inspired by the Spider, a pulp crime-fighter he had enjoyed in his youth. Kirby would assert his own part in the wall-crawler’s origins, insisting on a link to the Silver Spider, a co-creation with Joe Simon that some say evolved into Archie Comics hero the Fly.

“The idea was already there when I talked to Stan,” stated Kirby, although his take was one we wouldn’t recognise: this goggle-masked hero packed a web-pistol and gained his powers from a magic ring.

“I didn’t want this character to look like your usual superhero,” said Lee. “I just wanted him to be a shy teenager, who wasn’t too handsome. When Jack drew him, Spider-Man looked like all of Jack’s other heroes.” Or, as Kirby’s ex-partner Simon put it, “Captain America with cobwebs”.

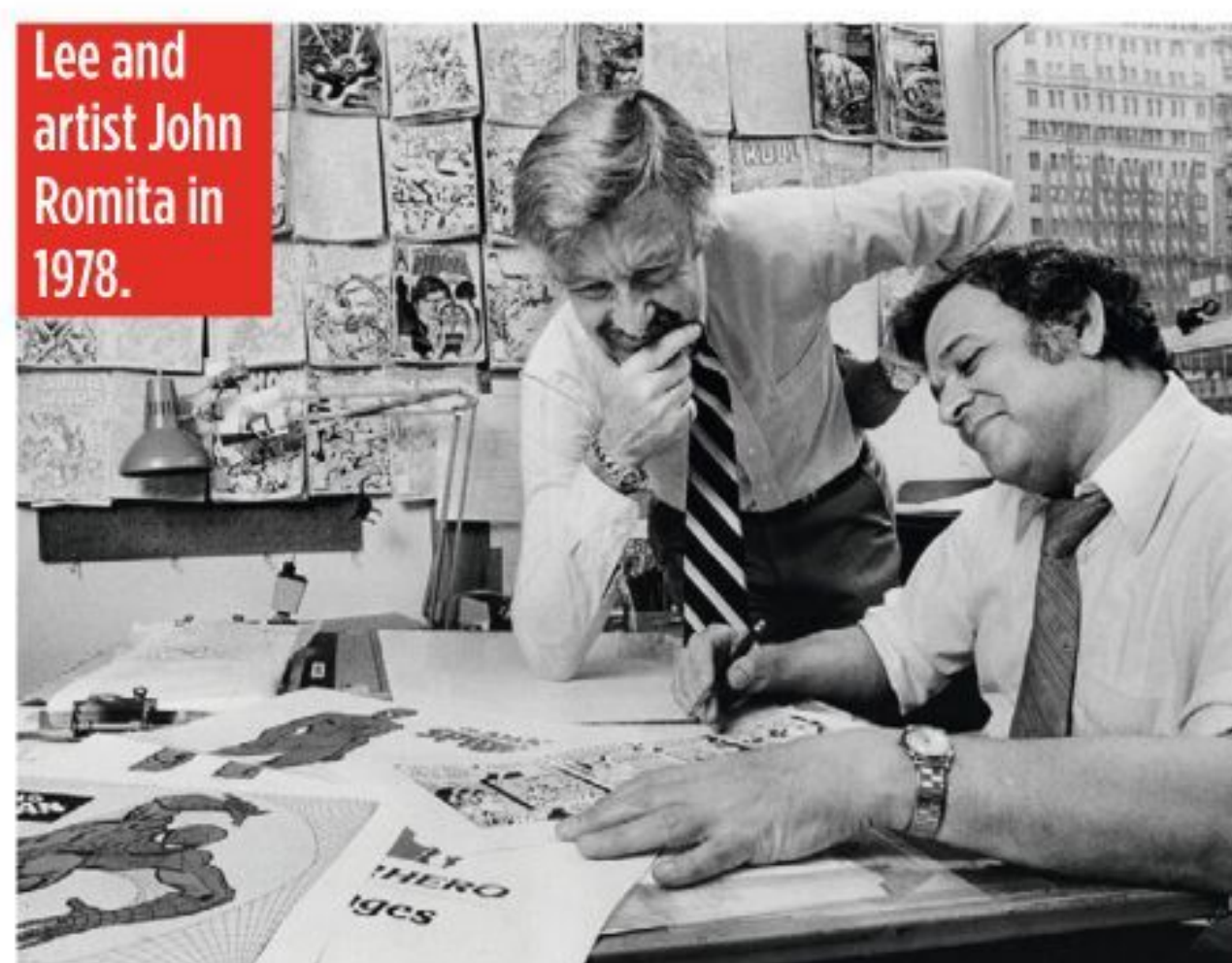
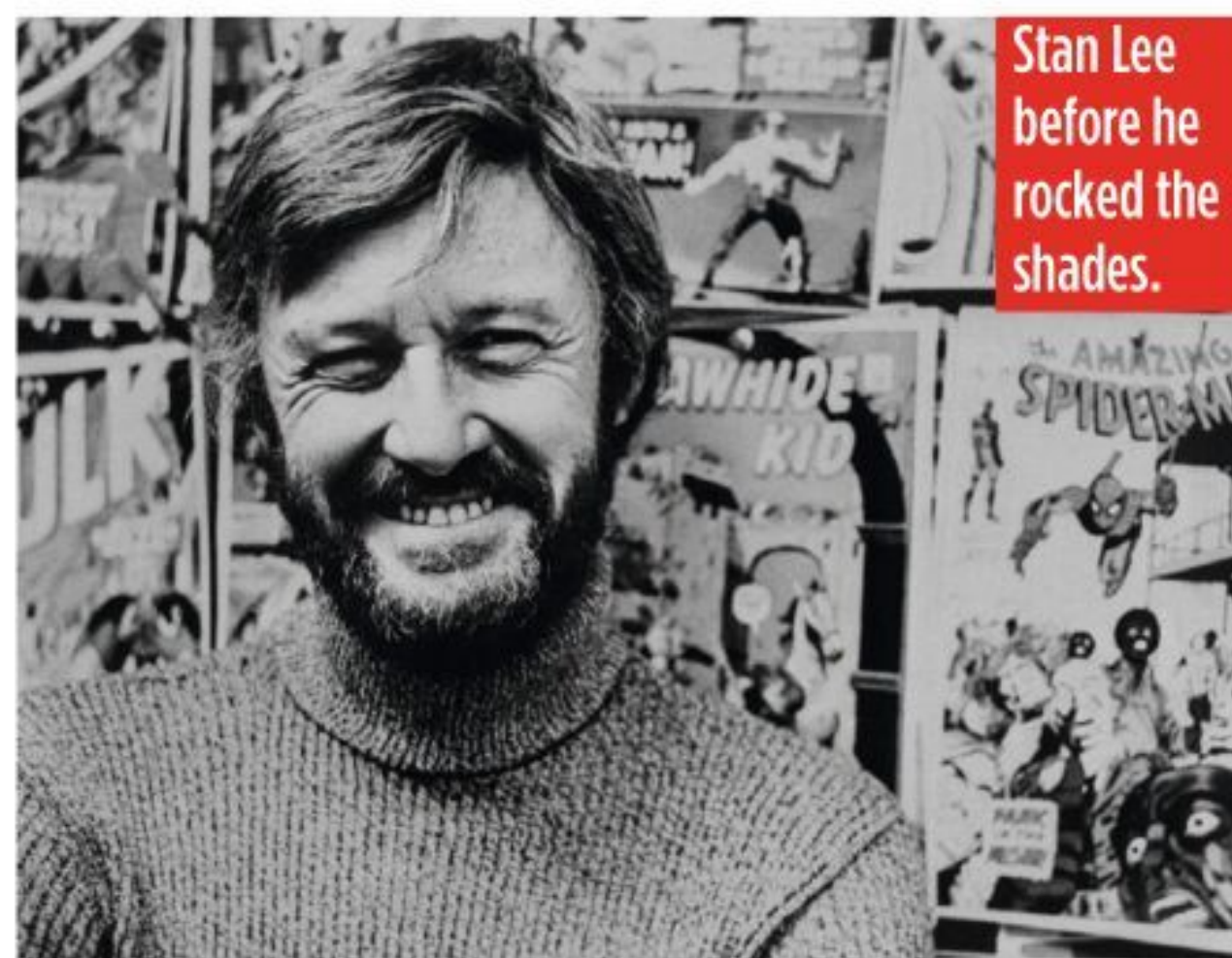
Lee needed awkwardness and realism, not sturdy, outsized heroics. Enter Steve Ditko, an artist known for twist-loaded sci-fi shockers and rampaging monster tales in Marvel’s anthology titles. The reclusive and intense Ditko brought the perfect outsider sensibility to Spider-Man: his work was off-kilter, idiosyncratic, peopled with characters seemingly on the edge of nervous exhaustion.

Cities bristled with paranoid shadows, far from the grandeur of Kirby’s Asgard or the cosmic realms explored by the FF. Our first glimpse of Peter Parker – scrawny, bespectacled, ostracised by classmates – looks very much like one of the precious few photos of Ditko in existence.

For Danny Fingeroth, comic book writer, editor of Marvel’s Spider-Man line in the ’80s and author of *A Marvelous Life: The Amazing Story Of Stan Lee*, the Lee-Ditko partnership “when it was working was, indeed, a form of alchemy.” As he tells *SFX*, “They were both mature adults – Stan was 39 and Steve 34 in 1962 – who brought their life and career experience to this teenaged character.”

While admitting “I don’t think they had any relationship outside the comics they worked on”, Fingeroth believes they “seem to have genuinely enjoyed working together, playfully ribbing each other in print, such as in ‘How Stan Lee And Steve Ditko Create Spider-Man’, from the first *Amazing Spider-Man* Annual.”

“I’m willing to say he’s the co-creator,” said Lee of Ditko. “Spider-Man needed Steve to transform him from an idea into artwork on paper. Steve had to design the look of the character.” It was Ditko who decided on the full-face mask, a smart choice that made



Spider-Man an avatar for every reader.

“I wasn’t sure Stan would like the idea of covering the character’s face,” he remembered, “but I did it because it hid an obviously boyish face. It would also add mystery to the character...” The hyphen in the title was all Stan’s, however, there to differentiate it from the Superman logo. “A lot of people forget the hyphen and that just drives me crazy,” said Lee. “It’s like I’m having a hyphen war with the whole world.”

#### NEW SPIN

That 11-page origin story in *Amazing Fantasy* 15 has the compact power of a fable. The contemporary shadow of atomic science colours the fateful spider-bite: “When I was creating characters nearly all of them gained their powers through some sort of radioactivity,” Lee told *Comic Media News* in 1976. “It was on everybody’s mind in the early ’60s and seemed the easy thing to do... These were not very intricately thought-through things, they were usually the first thing that came to mind.”

But there’s a more timeless moral dimension that makes this story of ego, loss and sudden humility resonate, six decades on. On the final



page “a lean, silent figure slowly fades into the gathering darkness” as Ditko positions Peter Parker between moonlit buildings and a gloomy, ink-blue sky. Unlike Batman or Superman, who triumph over the tragedies that form them, this doomy path threatens to claim Peter completely.

Spider-Man’s debut proved an unexpected smash (ironically Lee rejected Ditko’s stab at a cover, entrusting it to Kirby instead, who supplied a more dynamic, attention-grabbing perspective). And so “America’s most DIFFERENT new teen-age idol” – as that issue billed him – quickly won his own title. *The Amazing Spider-Man* stole a superlative from the freshly cancelled *Amazing Fantasy* and was soon Marvel’s second-best seller behind the flagship *Fantastic Four*. In time Spidey would become the face of the company itself.

Key to the success of these Lee and Ditko tales was Peter Parker and his world of everyday pressures and high school drama. An anxious, lovelorn nerd, routinely thwarted by life, Peter was the ultimate identification figure for comic book readers: lacking a Batcave or Fortress of Solitude, he resorts to rinsing his costume in the sink.

## “Spider-Man needed Steve to transform him from an idea into artwork on paper”

“Spider-Man is easy for fans to relate to because he’s really an everyman who has the same problems and hang-ups as they do,” Lee told *SFX* in 2011. “He has trouble earning a living, and is always facing some sort of romantic dilemma.”

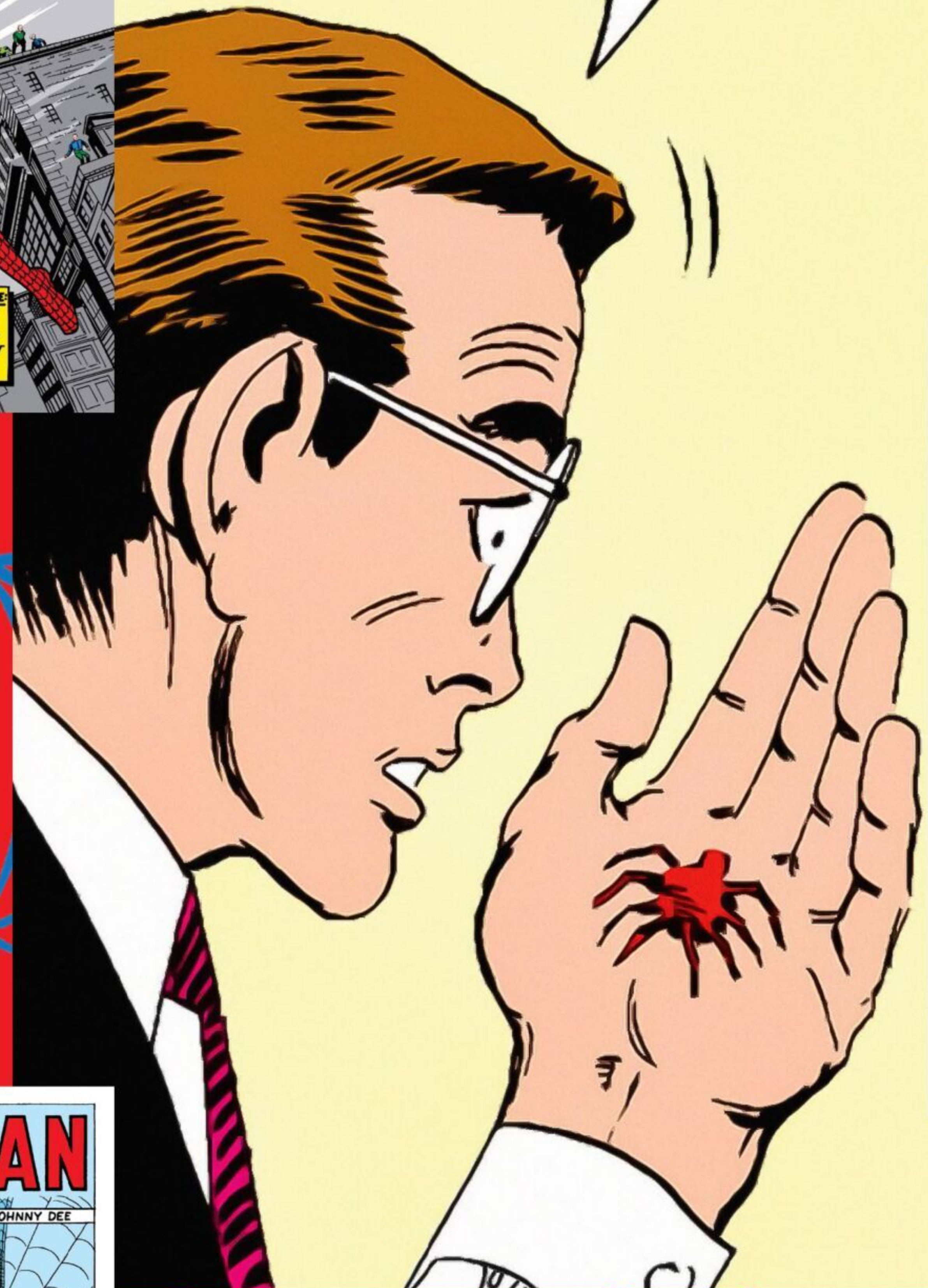
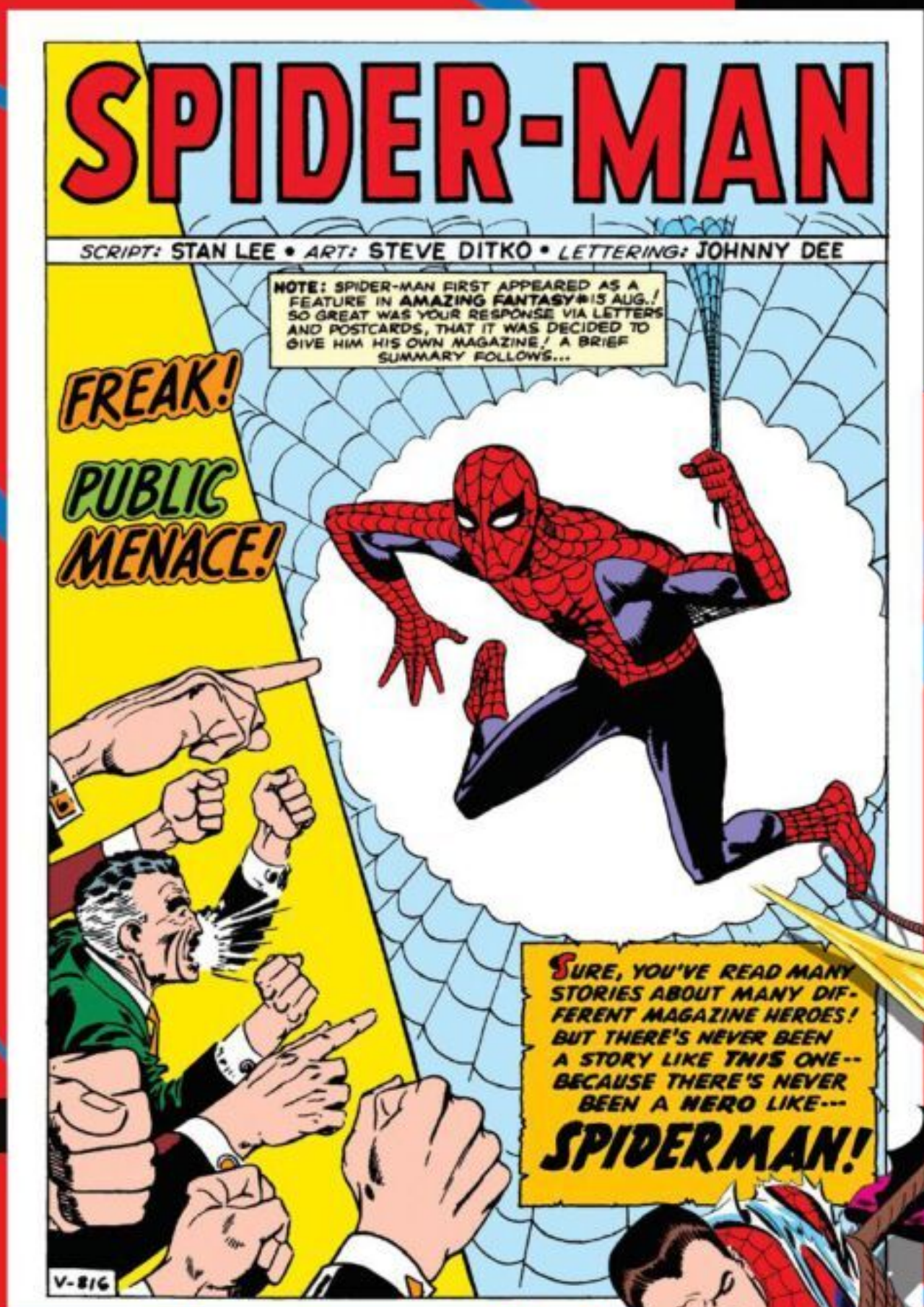
“He’s really the regular person superhero,” agrees Danny Fingeroth. “He’s always trying to do the right thing, but is often prevented by circumstances from doing everything right, all the time. That’s an attitude most people can relate to.”

“Peter is also consistently inconsistent. At various times he says he’s Spider-Man for different reasons: to atone for his belief that it’s his fault that Uncle Ben was murdered, although a strong case could be made that it wasn’t his fault at all; to make money taking photos of Spider-Man, although there are a million other ways someone with his powers and abilities could make money; because it’s fun to be Spider-Man – which is, in many ways, key to the character’s popularity. I once mentioned this to Spider-writer extraordinaire Tom DeFalco and he replied, ‘Yeah, the guy doesn’t have a clue!’ Just like you and me.” →

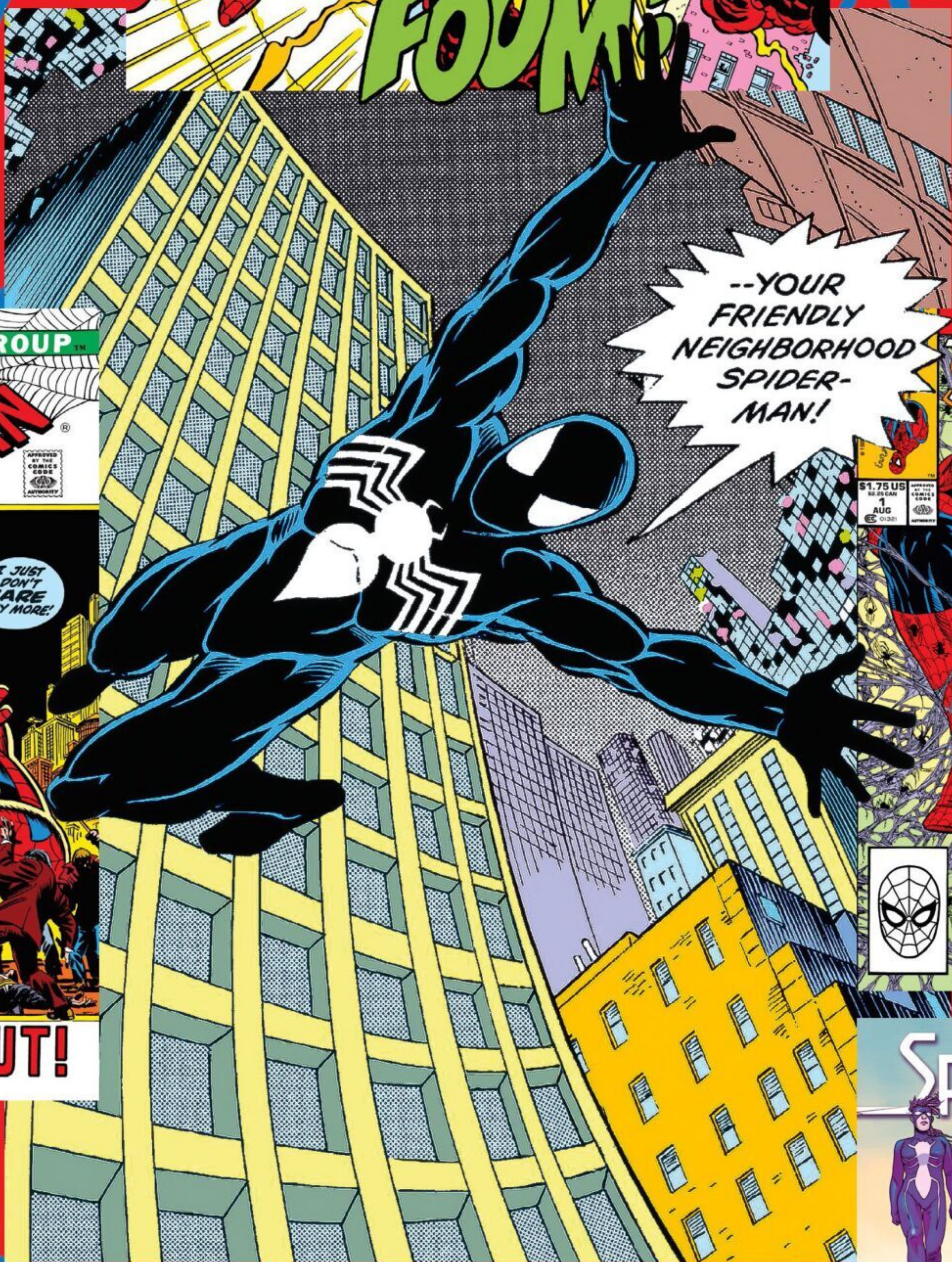
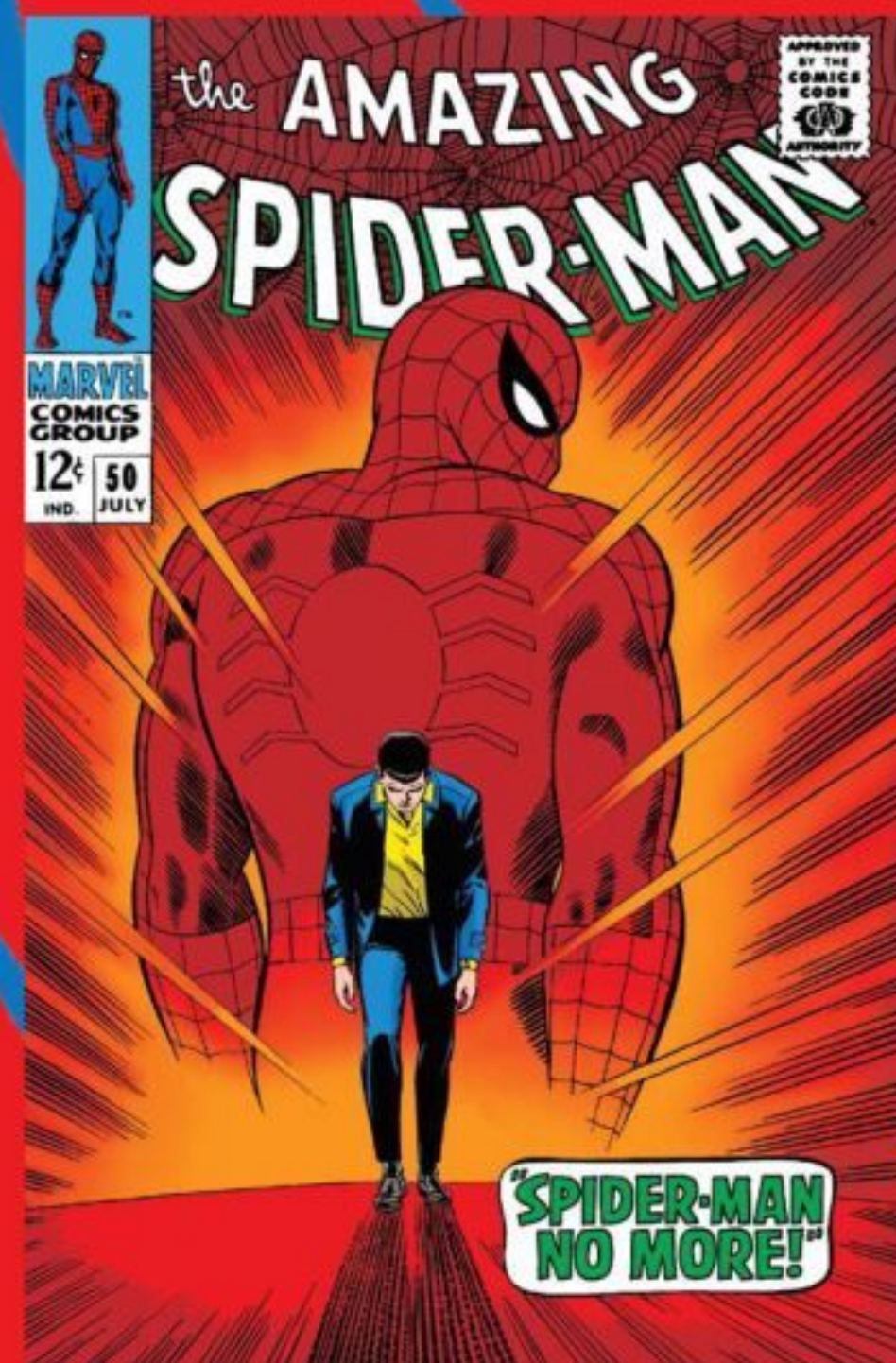
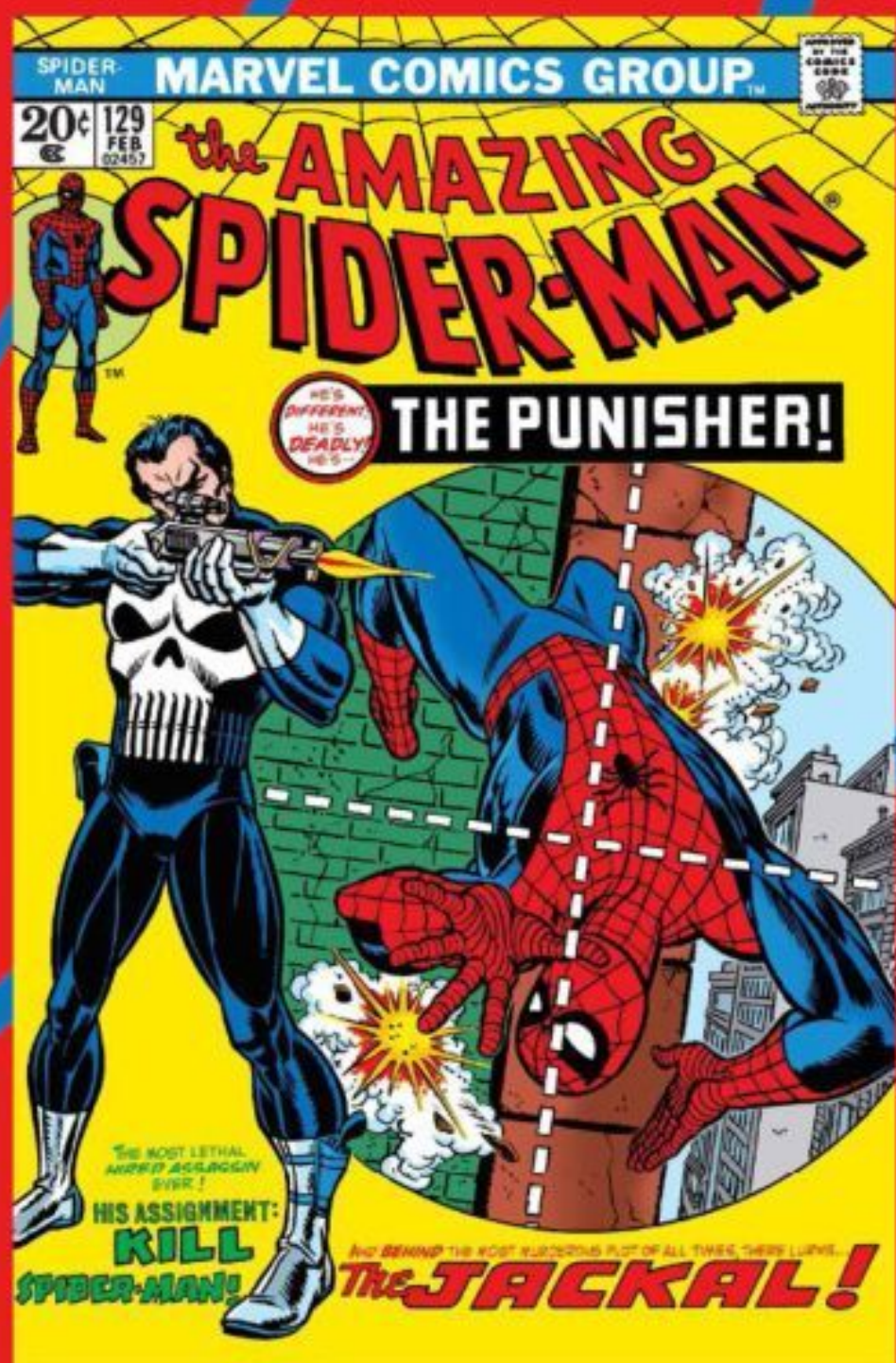




A-A SPIDER! IT BIT ME!  
BUT, WHY IS IT **BURNING**  
SO? WHY IS IT **GLOWING**  
THAT WAY??









Peter Parker's twin identities mirrored the personas of his makers. Peter can be seen as the pensive Ditko; the mask frees him to be Lee, a flippant, wisecracking showman, trading cornball banter as he punches the bad guys. In real life this partnership of opposites couldn't hold. The artist quit after July 1966's *The Amazing Spider-Man* 38, allegedly over Lee's insistence that supervillain the Green Goblin should be unmasked as someone the reader knew, rather than a complete unknown, as Ditko pushed for.

"I said to him once, 'What the hell did you quit for?'" remembered Lee. "And he said 'You know!' And I don't know, and he never told me, and that was it."

Ditko's replacement was John Romita, known for his work on romance comics. Romita gave us an altogether studlier Peter Parker and unveiled the deeply glamorous Mary Jane Watson – "Face it, tiger... you just hit the jackpot!" – but also delivered the dynamic physicality that superheroics demanded.

Together Lee and Romita built on the book's foundations, expanding the web-slinger's supporting cast and rogues' gallery. Burly mobster the Kingpin debuted in *The Amazing Spider-Man* 50, a contrast to the likes of the Lizard, the Vulture and Doctor Octopus, beast-themed boffins who felt like twisted reflections of the scientifically gifted Peter.

## TANGLED WEB

By the 1970s Spider-Man's world was darkening. Turbulent times in America were reflected in tales of campus riots and drug addiction. A clash with urban vigilante the Punisher saw the wall-crawler confront a new breed of anti-hero, one shaped by the war in Vietnam, already a psychic wound for the US.

Meanwhile an easing of the comic industry's censorship guidelines freed him to fight such horror-themed menaces as Morbius the Living Vampire and even Dracula himself. Most shockingly of all, "The Night Gwen Stacy Died" in *The Amazing Spider-Man* 121 saw Peter Parker lose the light of his life in the most emotionally raw story since his 1962 origin tale.

"It was a dark time," reflected writer Gerry Conway. "Young men my age were dying in a war no one wanted to fight, a President was under siege for sanctioning criminal acts... the streets weren't safe, vigilantes were shooting people on the subway. The world was going mad. So when it came time for Spider-Man to save the girl he loved from certain death, it seemed to me only natural that he fail."

But the amazing Spider-brand was bigger than ever. When DC and Marvel shattered the laws of reality by collaborating on a cross-company project in 1976 it was Spider-Man

## THE LIFE OF REILLY

### Spidey's clone wars

The Clone Saga stands as the definitive Spider-Man storyline of the '90s – and one of the most provocative in the character's history, designed as Marvel's counterstrike to such mythology-shaking DC Comics epics as *The Death Of Superman* and Batman's *Knightfall* arc.

Riffing on a plot point from 1975, it threatened to reveal that readers had really been following the adventures of Peter Parker's clone for the past two decades. While Ben Reilly, aka the Scarlet Spider, ultimately proved to be the lab-bred doppelgänger, the increasingly convoluted uberplot twisted on for years, through multiple titles and spin-offs.

"The Clone Saga – which for a long while increased *Spider-Man* comics sales when pretty much everything else was declining – became a lightning rod for the collective nervous breakdown the superhero comics business was undergoing," says Danny Fingeroth, former group editor of Marvel's *Spider-Man* line.

"The extreme reactions to it had, in my view, little to do with the actual content of the comics, but rather with an anxiety people in and around comics were feeling due to a variety of business decisions and related economic developments."

So how does Fingeroth view the saga now? "It was an exciting storyline that was eventually dragged out too long for marketing reasons outside the creators' and editors' control," he tells *SFX*, "one that, though ultimately undone – like a hundred other comics storylines over the decades – provided the basis for many future storylines and countless collected reprint editions. It was risky and thrilling for creators and readers alike."



who went icon-to-icon with Superman. Three new titles were launched: *The Spectacular Spider-Man*, *Marvel Team-Up* and *Spidey Super Stories*, for younger readers. An animated series in 1967 had seen Spider-Man take his first steps to multimedia domination, complete with an infectious jazz theme tune that did whatever a theme tune could. Now, a decade on, he had his own live action TV show, even if it did feel like standard cop show fare reskinned with spandex.

1984's epic *Secret Wars* saga shook up the look. In came a striking, black-and-white variant of the classic Ditko costume. Marvel feared a backlash from the fans but *Spider-Man* 252 – the new outfit's tantalising first appearance – was a sales sensation. Later revealed as a living alien symbiote, the black costume reincarnated as the vicious Venom, who won his own title in 1993.

By then Marvel was shamelessly playing to the speculator market, built on the success of such buzzworthy talents as Todd McFarlane, whose anatomically challenging take on Spider-Man – complete with oversized eyes and spews of insanely detailed webbing – echoed some of the essential weirdness of

**“Peter Parker should always have problems... Why should he be any different from us?”**

Ditko. Released in multiple collectible editions, McFarlane's adjective-shy *Spider-Man* 1 sold 2.5 million copies.

Over the past decades Spider-Man has conquered the big screen. In the comics his life is more complicated than ever: in 2002 writer J Michael Straczynski introduced the idea of the Spider-Totem, a supernatural force linking Peter Parker to the cosmic Web of Life and Destiny; and a demonic pact undid global reality – including Peter and MJ's wedding – in 2007's controversial "One More Day".

In 2012 *The Superior Spider-Man* saw Doctor Octopus's mind in command of our hero's body, while 2014's *Spider-Verse* gathered a seemingly infinite parade of web-slingers from alternate Earths. Sometimes it all feels very far from that teenage boy washing a handmade outfit in the sink.

But 60 years on the essential DNA of the character endures, even if that DNA was changed forever by a radioactive spider bite.

"I think Peter Parker should always have problems," said Stan Lee, nailing the heart of the character. "Why should he be any different from the rest of us?" ●

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## STEVE TOUSSAINT

*House Of The Dragon's legendary Sea Snake tells all...*

Words by Will Salmon /// Photography by Rachell Smith

**S**teve Toussaint has been a British TV mainstay for the last couple of decades, often appearing in popular crime dramas like *Lewis*, *Silent Witness* and *Waking The Dead*. In recent years he's impressed in critically acclaimed dramas like *Line Of Duty*, *It's A Sin* and *Small Axe*. But despite a role in 2010's *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* and a part in *Doctor Who*, he's more or less avoided fantasy fare – until now. In *Game Of Thrones* spin-off *House Of The Dragon* he takes on the part of naval hero Corlys Velaryon – the Sea Snake. It's given him the chance to flex his muscles, both literally and metaphorically.

### He's an important, powerful man, but what were your first impressions of Corlys Velaryon?

➔ He's a very rich man and a great naval warrior, but for him it's all about his familial relationships. When I met Miguel [Sapochnik, co-showrunner] we ended up talking a lot about fatherhood. I found it really interesting that this was the angle they were coming from for Corlys. It's about his hopes for his kids and his wife Rhaenys and so on. Alongside all of the bashing people's heads in with axes!

### You mentioned Rhaenys Targaryen there – what's Corlys's relationship with his wife like? Are they a happy couple?

➔ Yes, I think they are. One of the things that both Eve [Best] and I asked Miguel and Ryan was, "Did this relationship come together as a merger? Is it strategic or is it a love thing?" And they were quite adamant that it was a loving relationship. The way my character is with her, you don't see him like that with other people. He's very keen to get advice from her – though he doesn't always take it! And Eve is brilliant. After the first day's shooting – we filmed episode seven first, I think – I went home and told my partner, "Thank god for Eve Best". You couldn't want for a better scene partner.

### How are you finding filming the action sequences? Fun? Exhausting?

➔ I mean, they're both! The battles on the page will say something like, I dunno, "They fall and then they fight" – and that's pretty much it. But then the director and the stunt coordinator start explaining it and you go through this incredible choreography. My character has this huge weapon which is like a long staff. On one end of it's a

double-edged blade and on the other end is a very heavy ball, which he uses to crack people's skulls. We practise for a few weeks, but of course on location it's all on sand, with smoke and extras that you're not used to... I felt like I was just flailing around, but it looks magnificent.

### What sort of journey does your character go on?

➔ When we meet Corlys he is all about his legacy, he's all about "I want *this* and I want *this*!" He does go on a journey emotionally, but that's all I can say about that, except that it leads to some wonderful scenes. There's one I really enjoyed doing with Matt [Smith] where I am trying to persuade him to do something. It's very interesting, because [Smith's character] Daemon Targaryen is an incredibly dangerous person. Everybody in the realm is wary of him. Corlys is not scared of him, but he's aware of just how volatile he is. Matt does such a great job playing him.

### Plus he was the Doctor! You've also been on that show, in "Ascension Of The Cybermen". What was that like?

➔ That was such a fun part. I was only there for a couple of days, acting with Jodie Whittaker. It can be hard to go into a long-running show as a guest star. It sort of behooves the regular stars to make you feel at ease so that you can do your best work – and that's exactly what they did.

### What are you looking for in a role these days?

➔ I'm drawn to characters that have a dark secret or a darkness about them. I used to love film noirs, which tend to be about a hapless hero dragged into something by mistake. Nice, ordinary people, but then oh my god, there's a dark secret!

### Does TV offer more as an actor than the cinema now?

➔ From my perspective, I think that's the case. Not always, of course, but it's been like that for a few years now. You can tell a story in 10 hours, and go into much more depth.

### What are you most excited for people to see in *House Of The Dragon*?

➔ The dragons! I think we've got about 16 or 17 of them. There were only three or four in *Game Of Thrones* but we've got loads. And just the work of the people involved. I think fans are just going to really enjoy this world that we've managed to create. I have very high hopes for it. ●

*House Of The Dragon is on Sky Atlantic and NOW.*

### BIODATA

From  
**Portsmouth**

Greatest Hits  
**Jill's dad Alan in *It's A Sin*; Feekat, one of the last humans, in *Doctor Who*; CS Ray Mallick in *Line Of Duty*.**

Random Fact  
**Toussaint had a small part in 1995's awful/amazing (delete where applicable) Sylvester Stallone-starring *Judge Dredd* movie, in which he played the Hunter Squad Leader.**



“I’m drawn to characters that have a dark secret or a darkness about them”



**W**HERE IS THE MOST Marvellous place on Earth? Why, the Avengers Campus at Disneyland Paris, of course. Opened with a lavish event this summer, it's the only Marvel theme park in Europe and the only one globally to boast the Disney Hotel New York – The Art of Marvel, a themed destination for fans to stay on-site. As well as that, it's *also* the only Disney park that's home to the new high-speed roller coaster Avengers Assemble: Flight Force. But even that's not all...

## CITY LIVING

Walt Disney's Studios Park, one of two located at Marne-La-Vallée, Paris, celebrates 30 years in 2022 and, following the Anaheim launch of a similar expansion based on the Marvel Cinematic Universe, is now home to a host of heroes. Of course *SFX* was going to check it out – it being a mere hop, skip and hero-landing via Eurostar.

Our adventure begins in the aforementioned hotel – this actually opened in 2021, but we all know why even Earth's mightiest had to stay at home. It's breathtaking from the moment you arrive – with huge statues of iconic characters overlooking the lake outside and high ceilings inside housing 350 pieces of artwork, 50 of which can only be viewed at Disneyland Paris.

Iron Man suits encased in vast glass cabinets watch over you as you check in – but it'll take you a while to actually reach your room because there's just so many Easter eggs and distractions. "Hang on a second, just let me get a picture of this..." becomes something of a mantra from the start. From comic covers on the walls, to ones you can step into and actually become a part of, it's unlike any other hotel experience we've had. We even stopped to look at luggage carts, such is the attention to detail.

It's all part of making Avengers Campus fully immersive – and that comes right down to the bars and restaurants here in the hotel. Keep an eye on those "windows" overlooking New York while you're having a late-night drink, you never know who might swing by...

Speaking of immersive, there's a guest-only Super Hero Station in the hotel which allows you to have your picture taken in iconic Marvel moments, as well as with various different characters. You want to sit on the roof of Peter Parker's bedroom? Who are we to judge – go right ahead!

And of course the hotel rooms all have different character art and nods throughout – even down to the soap. But we're not just here to stay in a hotel, as tempting as that might be. There's an entire Marvel land to be explored just around the corner! Where else in the world can your to-do list be to get up, eat and just have fun all day? →

# HOLDING

SFX CONSIDERS RELOCATING OFFICES AFTER  
A VISIT TO **AVENGERS CAMPUS**  
AT DISNEYLAND PARIS

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

Fans meet  
Captain  
America as he  
patrols.





# OUT FOR A HERO

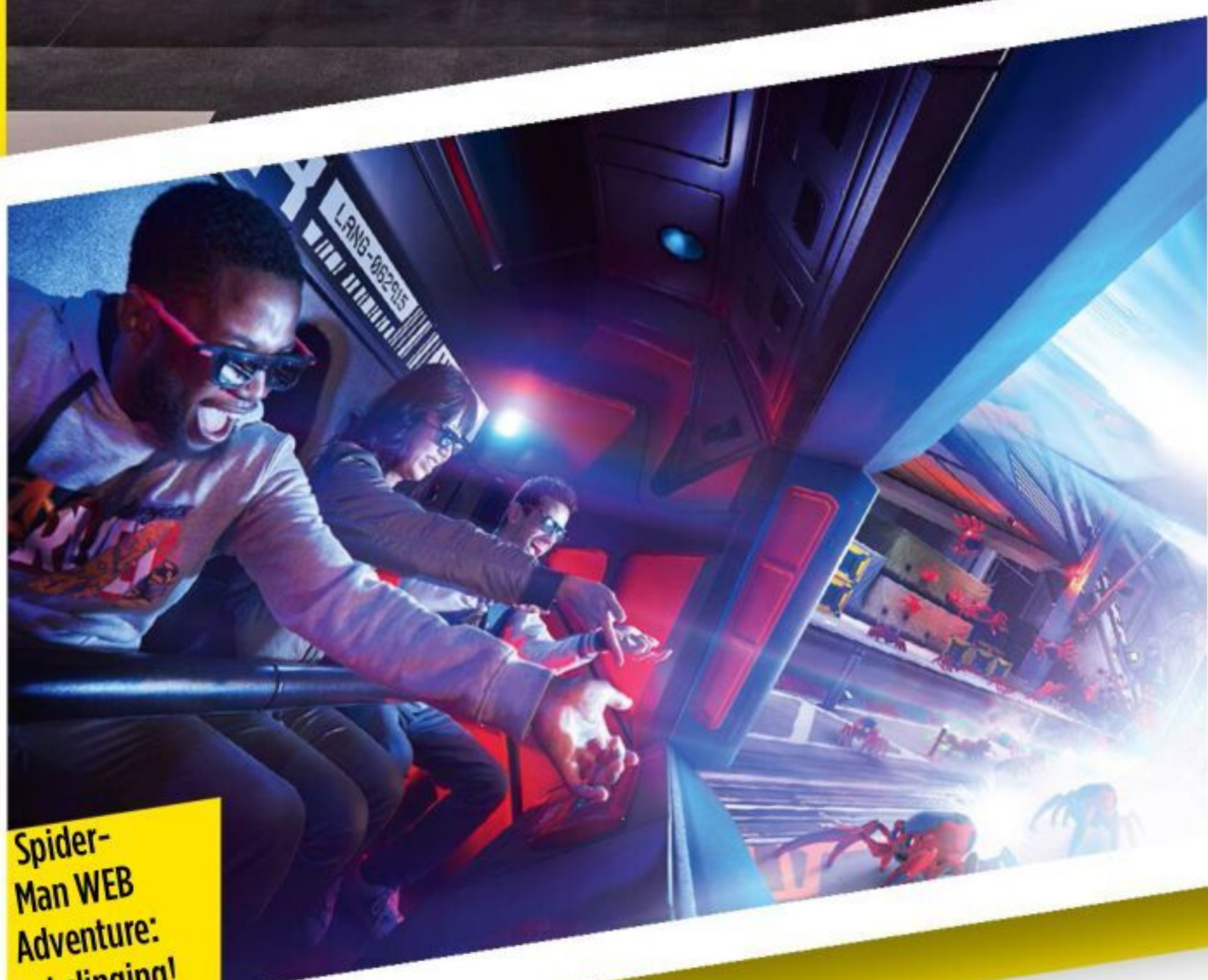
AVENGERS CAMPUS



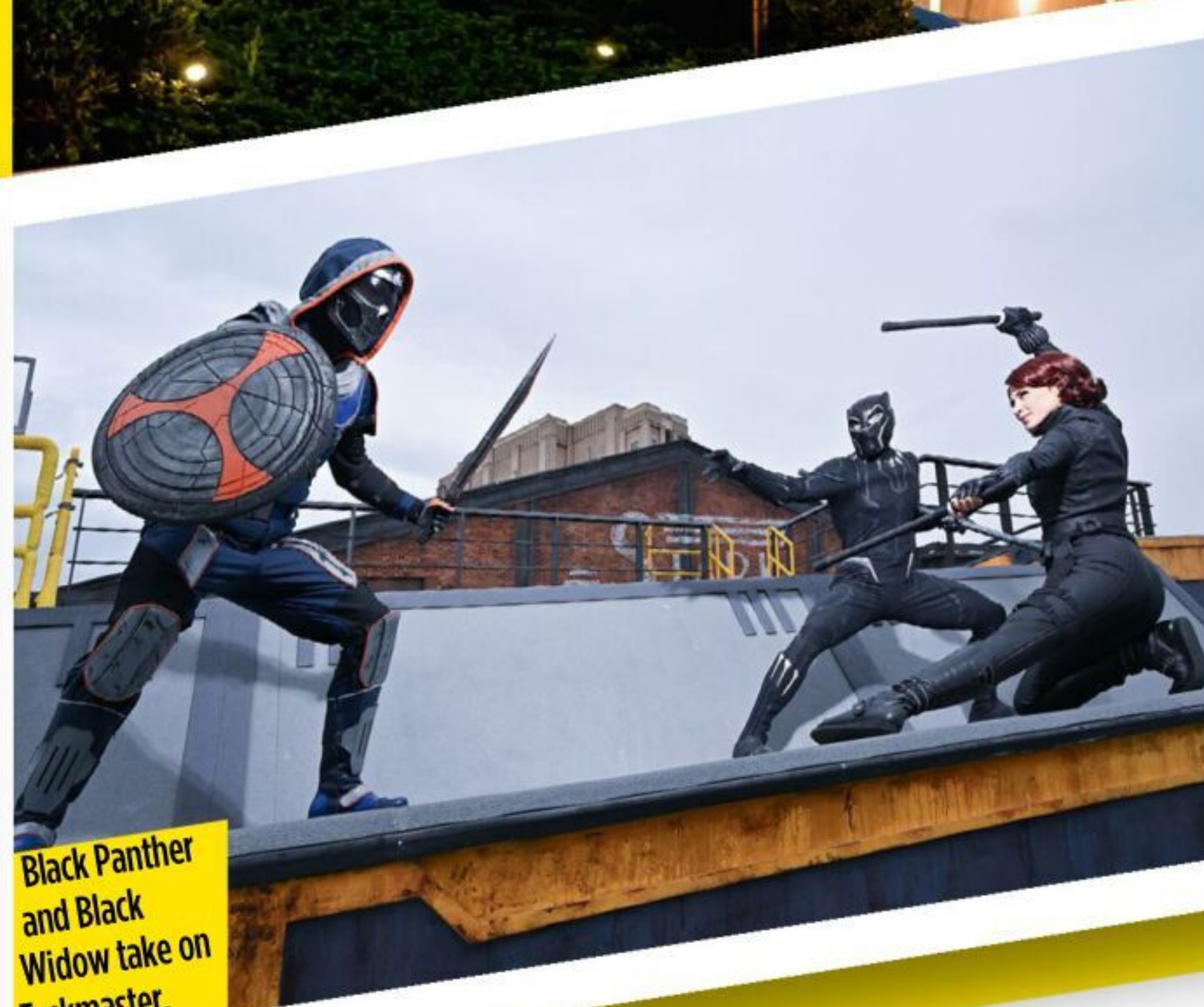


## AVENGERS CAMPUS

The Downtown Restaurant in Disney Hotel.



Spider-Man WEB Adventure: get slinging!



Black Panther and Black Widow take on Taskmaster.

Walt Disney Imagineering teams in Paris and around the world have done an incredible job of creating the new in-world experience of Avengers Campus, linking the rides, live experiences and dining into one walk-through journey that will bring a “Squee!” to fans of all ages. Yes, that included us. Like you wouldn’t wave if you saw Spidey on a rooftop!

First up, past an Ant-Man themed meet and greet photo-op station, is Spider-Man WEB Adventure. Like the hugely popular version at Disney’s California theme park, this dark “shooting” ride takes you and Tom Holland’s Spider-Man on a journey round Avengers Campus as you use your web-slinging powers to destroy the rampaging Spider-Bots. Not only is it joyful to see web shooting from your

hands, you also get quite the upper-arm workout. It’s *enormous* fun and definitely worth popping back for multiple visits – whether that’s to beat your previous score (or your friends’) or to take in all the action that’s happening around you, even down to the pre-ride queue surprises.

Be warned, you will leave this ride wanting your own Spider-Bot. And as luck would have it, you do, of course, leave via the gift shop! It’s also here that you can get additional items that allow you to customise your ride experience and increase your powers – another first for Disneyland Paris.

Riders can upgrade to draw from the various strengths of Doctor Strange and Iron Man, as well as electro-dynamic spider webs. Marvel collectors beware – you’re going to want all of these things.

Avengers Campus, we’re told, has been created by Tony Stark in order to have a training ground for future heroes – that’s you and me, by the way. But you don’t just get to wear spandex – no more than usual, anyway – you actually get to work alongside the Avengers.

As you walk further into the site there’s a life-size (well, we imagine that’s what size it would be) replica of the Avengers Quinjet, parked on top of the Hero Training Centre. It’s in this building that you can meet various heroes – we opted for Spider-Man – to have a chat about all things heroic and, most importantly, have your photo taken. In the age of the selfie, Avengers Campus definitely has you covered for







The Avengers Quinjet on the Hero Training Centre.

shareable memories from breakfast right through to dinner.

Opposite the Hero Training Centre is the Avengers Headquarters, where Avengers Assemble: Flight Force is housed. This is the only place in the world where you can take part on this ride, interact with an extremely impressive audio-animatronic Iron Man (another world first) and see new footage of Brie Larson as Captain Marvel.

Eagle-eyed theme park enthusiasts will remember an earlier incarnation of this as the Aerosmith Rock 'N' Roller Coaster, but it's been completely regenerated – the outside of the building is now home to artificial intelligence FRIDAY, who speaks to recruits throughout the day, warns of threats and announces when Avengers are in the vicinity. This is another global first for a Marvel theme park.

Inside, however, it's still a dark ride, super-speed intense roller coaster. And we do mean intense! You fly through space in a ship created by Tony Stark in order to avert a disaster. You're probably going to miss some of the specially filmed material, so you might want to go on again, if you can stomach it...

The action spills out into the streets of the Campus, as well as up onto the rooftops. On ground level, you can train with Okoye and the Dora Milaje to become Warrior Allies of Wakanda, or dance with Star-Lord and Gamora. Doctor Strange, Ant-Man and Thor are just a few of the heroes that regularly walk through the Campus, interacting with guests.

Up above on the rooftops, Black Widow and Black Panther take the high ground to battle the invading forces of Taskmaster – you might even get lucky and see Spidey tackling thugs up there too. It all creates a thrilling immersive experience where anything could seemingly happen at any time, and you'll find yourself completely caught up in it all.

## POWER FUEL

But it's not all breathtaking, high-octane adventures – a working hero's gotta eat, right? The dining is, as expected, also Marvel-themed and created to be in-world and demand yet more Instagram moments. Pym Kitchen takes the form of a science lab where, you guessed it, things are bigger or smaller than they should be. That means you can have portions that allow you to try more of everything – and there's a lot – or tuck into giant pretzels, burgers and cakes. Washed down with a test

Check out the edible goodies in the Pym Kitchen.



Iron Man armours on display in the hotel.



tube of blue Chardonnay, naturally. Stark Factory is food for those on the go – but still has impressive models and theming throughout, under the guise of being a “former assembly line for Howard Stark”. There's lots of Easter eggs for fans to spot here, including items from SHIELD's past adventures. One item you can't fail to miss as you enter is the massive HulkBuster armour, another exclusive for this theme park.

Other, smaller, food truck options are situated throughout the facility. Of course, once you're inside Avengers Campus it's easy to forget that this is just one part of two large Disney theme parks with many other amenities and attractions available nearby.

It's already exciting to consider the many options for expanding Avengers Campus, along with all the new characters set to join the MCU over the coming years. But for now, it's a total fan joy to be able to experience something like this – and that's before you remember that there are *Star Wars* rides just next door too.

Thirty years ago, fans could only dream of something like this – now you can walk the streets with heroes and see people of all ages having an absolute blast. It's a real-world reminder that this sort of sheer unadulterated joy is what fandom is actually all about. Avengers – assemble! ●

For more details and tickets visit [disneyholidays.co.uk](https://disneyholidays.co.uk).



# GRANT MORRISON

Shifting identities: the comics star tells us about their debut novel

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Allan Amato

**T**HE LAST TIME GRANT MORRISON completed a novel – at least, until Covid-19 hit – they were 18 years old. Set in Glastonbury, and imagining the Arthurian world colliding with the present day, it was, says Morrison, “super [Alan] Garner-esque”. Nothing wrong with that – most novelists have juvenilia locked in a drawer. Yet, despite enjoying a glittering career in comics, it has taken Morrison over 40 years to finish another, *Luda*.

In part, it seems, this gap is down to Dennis Potter. “He had this amazing withering quote,” says Morrison. “He said, ‘The novel, it’s just ‘he said, she said’ and descriptions of the sky.’ I was like, ‘Oh my god!’ And that kind of described my writing, frankly. So that’s why I was much happier to work in comics and media that had pictures, where I wasn’t actually responsible for descriptions of the sky.”

Morrison’s laughing as they say this, but an interest in the form endured. The problem was that they would embark on novels that would “get to page 250 and then die on the vine”. What was different about *Luda*? The pandemic for one thing. Where usually Morrison spends time travelling for work, they found themselves at home, “focused”. And while Morrison is careful to acknowledge the horrors of the pandemic, the scale of loss, a part of them nonetheless enjoyed the weirdness of lockdown: “It was like being in an eclipse. Something was edited out of the world.”

## UNDER THE GLAMOUR

The dreamlike strangeness of this time seems to permeate the theatre world-set *Luda*, the story of how ageing drag queen Luci LaBang teaches a dangerously beautiful protégée, the titular Luda, about The Glamour, used to mesmerise audiences. Perhaps in reaction to being written during austere days, it’s also a novel that delights in its own extravagance. Morrison mentions Oscar Wilde, Quentin Crisp and Hunter S Thompson as influences, larger than life writers who each challenged convention and authority.

The book is also largely autobiographical, “just shifted over to a parallel universe”. In 2020, Morrison told *Mondo 2000* they had “been non-binary, cross-dressing, genderqueer” since they were 10. They spent “a lot of time in the ’90s in drag”, they tell *SFX*. Plus the world of the theatre, including the seediness of this world, is partly based on time Morrison spent in a band.

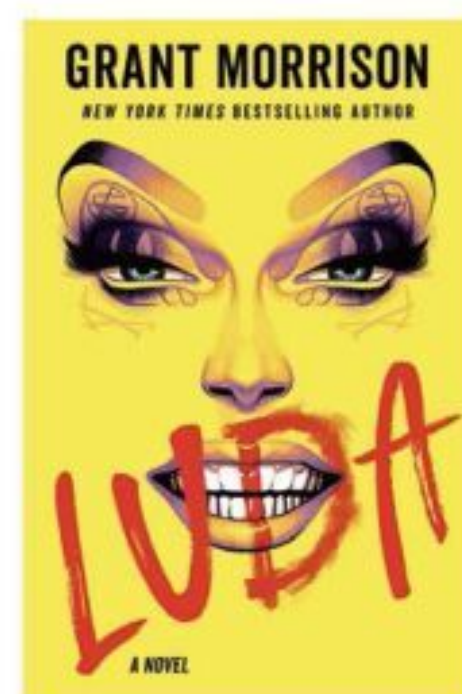
“On top of that, I wanted to talk more about performers and people like me who’ve never felt of any fixed identity,” they say. “You just put on clothes: put on a suit and be a

## BIODATA

From  
Glasgow

Greatest Hits  
**Where to begin?**  
Morrison’s most successful and/or influential comics include *Doom Patrol*, *All-Star Superman* and *The Invisibles* for DC. Morrison was also a producer and writer on the recent US TV version of *Brave New World*.

Random Fact  
Morrison pitched ideas for *Doctor Who* to Steven Moffat, including a story featuring a child version of the Doctor. None were commissioned.



gangster, put on leather and be in *The Matrix*, put on a dress and be a dominatrix. Because I was lucky enough as a kid to have a slender figure, I could get away with clothes that looked pretty good from either sex in the store.”

What the book definitely *isn't* about, they add, is being trans. Rather, it’s about people who were inspired by David Bowie, and the idea of “having many selves you want to express – and there’s a lot of ways of doing this”.

The mention of Bowie serves as a reminder that Morrison, now in their 60s, began exploring these identities in the wake of glam and as punk was breaking, in the days before the internet when, around the UK, people built micro-scenes from shared obsessions.

## FINE AND DANDY

“You form an aesthetic around that,” says Morrison, talking of their formative years in Glasgow. “We were into Michael Moorcock, Jerry Cornelius and *A Clockwork Orange*. We had this idea you had to be dandies. We were just working class kids, but looking fucking good became the thing.”

These micro-scenes developed slowly, at snail-mail pace, with people connecting via fanzines, mixtapes and live shows. There was a political element too. Morrison has spoken often about kicking against Thatcherism, and the politics of the time inevitably played into the work of the comic creators who made up the 1980s British Invasion of American imprints: the likes of Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and Morrison.

Even now, it seems mind-boggling that American comics editors were so open to leftfield British writers, but they were. “By the time I came along, it was really laissez-faire,” says Morrison. “It was a very exciting atmosphere.” Figures such as DC editor-in-chief Jenette Kahn were forward-looking, progressive. “She didn’t look at comics in a fanboy sense, she was interested in what ways they could be developed – could we emphasise the literary or artistic qualities? And she was really serious about that.”

Today, by contrast, the sheer value of franchises makes it more difficult to take such risks. Although, as Morrison notes, these things go in cycles, so who knows what the future holds? Meantime, Morrison is established enough not to worry too much. “I have more ideas than I know what to do with, and some will probably never make it to fruition,” they say. “So there’s no sense of drying up so far, as I commence my flamboyant dotage!” ●

*Luda: A Novel is out now, published by Del Rey Books.*



“I wanted to  
talk more about  
people like me  
who’ve never  
felt of any fixed  
identity”



—Autumn Savings—

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OCT  
2022

edited by Ian Berriman

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## CRIMES OF THE FUTURE

Cutting-edge art



▶ **RELEASED 9 SEPTEMBER**

18 | 107 minutes

▶ Director **David Cronenberg**

▶ Cast **Viggo Mortensen, Léa Seydoux, Scott Speedman, Kristen Stewart, Don McKellar, Welket Bungué**

➤ **The wait is over: 23 years** since the release of *eXistenZ*, David Cronenberg has *finally* made another sci-fi/horror film. And when it comes to probing the boundaries of what an audience can stomach, the king of body horror's return doesn't disappoint. Opening with a boy who eats plastic being suffocated by his mother, it builds to his corpse being cut open, his mutant digestive system displayed. No one else makes films like this – not even Cronenberg Jr, Brandon.

In this warped reality, changes to human pain thresholds have allowed surgery to become performance art. In a throwback to the time when dissection was a public spectacle, observers gather to watch someone sliced apart just as they might a string quartet performance. Viggo Mortensen

(whose decision to indicate health issues via regular throat-clearing distracts) and Léa Seydoux (one of several obfuscating accents which mean a subtitled Blu-ray will be a boon) are artists Saul Tenser and Caprice. The duo's work makes use of an autopsy device to excise new organs generated by Tenser's strange condition, "accelerated evolutionary syndrome".

Charged with a frisson of sexual perversity (Seydoux spends much of the film on the brink of licking her lips in erotic abandon), these sequences are powerfully stark, though not as stomach-flipping as they sound; the formalised settings and Tenser's lack of pain allow you to stay detached and appreciate the effects work. Performances by other artists, meanwhile – like a dancer covered in supernumerary ears – add dark surrealist humour.

Outside of these sequences, Cronenberg's transgressive concepts feel rather thinly dramatised. Another plot element concerns the dead boy's father (Scott Speedman), head of a cell of "radical evolutionists". There's also some business with Tenser



working as a stooly for "New Vice", the police department focused on this emergent area of human experience. But often the film's connective tissue seems to exist purely to provide exposition (Cronenberg is unembarrassed to have people asking questions like "Why don't you tell us what a registration tattoo is?"), or for characters to issue Cronenbergian statements such as "Surgery is the new sex". At times the film feels uninterested in generating tension or conflict. Early on, Cronenberg combined his signature themes with audience-pleasing tactics.

**“Transgressive concepts feel rather thinly dramatised”**

*Crimes* feels suited to itself being viewed in an exhibition space; or at the very least in the more rarefied sphere of the arthouse.

The director's recurring concerns are well-known to his fans, and much here will feel familiar. The sexualisation of trauma is straight out of *Crash*; the appendages of the autopsy





"I've got bad news. He's turning into Yoda."

sarcophagus recall *eXistenz*'s bone-gun; a brief digression regarding an "inner beauty contest" results in Tenser having a zip fitted in his abdomen – a comical echo of the abdominal slit hallucinated by *Videodrome*'s Max Renn. Beneath it all rumbles a question that runs throughout much of Cronenberg's oeuvre: what if bodily mutation were a positive development, not something to be feared?

The production design that brings to life Cronenberg's future tech – which also includes the "Breakfaster", a constantly shifting

skeletal chair built to aid digestion – is impressively weird. And it feels well-matched by the locations. Shooting took place in Athens, where they seem to have scouted every dank industrial basement and quayside haunted by rusted hulks. Decay is ever-present. Budgetary concerns may inform these choices, but they certainly help to conjure an air of sinister degradation.

Ultimately, the answer to the question "What would a Cronenberg genre film look like now?" turns out to be "Much the same as it always did". This is both

comforting and mildly disappointing. *Crimes*' script was originally written over two decades ago, and the film feels like it could have been produced then. Wouldn't it be intriguing to see Cronenberg dissecting, say, social media? On the evidence of *Crimes* it's hard to tell if he has acquired any major new concerns in all that time. Perhaps they'll emerge in future genre offerings. Let's hope we don't have to wait until 2047 for the next one. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Natalie Portman was initially set to play Caprice, but schedule conflicts with *Thor: Love And Thunder* forced a change.

## PASS THE SCALPEL

Four more surgery-themed horrors



### EYES WITHOUT A FACE (1960)

In Georges Franju's poetic effort, a plastic surgeon kidnaps young women, removing their faces to restore the looks of his daughter, injured in a car crash. *The Awful Dr Orlof* (1962), *Corruption* (1968) and *Faceless* (1988) all later riffed on it.

### ANATOMY (2000)

*Run Lola Run*'s Franka Potente plays a medical student in this German film, discovering an ancient secret society – the Anti-Hippocratic Society – whose members perform gruesome experiments on live "undesirables".



### THE HUMAN CENTIPEDE (2009)

Shares in sickbag manufacturers spiked thanks to Dutch director Tom Six, whose warped tale of a surgeon who stitches three people together, mouth to anus, turned into a trilogy, with progressively disgusting results.

### EXCISION (2012)

A disturbed high school student with a fascination for blood takes matters into her own hands when she learns that her younger sister's being put on a waiting list for a lung transplant...





Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja is going to be a big name.

## AFTER YANG

Artificial intelligence, real tears

★★★★★

► RELEASED 22 SEPTEMBER

Also on Sky Cinema

TBC | 96 minutes

► Director Kogonada

► Cast Colin Farrell, Jodie Turner-Smith, Justin H Min, Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja

➔ So many people imagine horrifying AI-influenced dystopias, but *After Yang* opts for a more sensitive and melancholy look at the potential future.

Colin Farrell taps into his knack for lightly depressed characters to play Jake, a tea-shop owner married to Kyra (Jodie Turner-Smith), and father of Mira (Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja), a delightful adopted daughter from China. The family also has a beloved cyborg named Yang (Justin H Min), designed to make Mira feel more at home and

connected to her heritage. When Yang, who's become one of the family, malfunctions, it's down to Jake to try and save him.

What results is much more profound than a simple journey to save a robot; director Kogonada is a master of tone, and gently asks questions about the nature of grief and what it means to be human. If an AI could choose to be human, what would that mean? And why would they want that, knowing all the pain and heartbreak that comes with it?

While those grand existential questions make the film a little heavy, there's some whimsy to break it up, most notably in the form of a killer synchronised dance routine.

Leila Latif

i The Flemings' house was an empty Eichler home (the work of developer Joseph Eichler), one of only three in New York.

## HATCHING

A bad egg

★★★★★

► RELEASED 16 SEPTEMBER

15 | 91 minutes

► Director Hanna Bergholm

► Cast Siiri Solalinna, Sophia Heikkilä, Jani Volanen, Reino Nordin

➔ In this dark Finnish fairy tale, a 12-year-old girl takes in a mysterious egg which grows and grows, before hatching into a weird human/bird hybrid. The screeching hatchling (realised through puppetry, animatronics and prosthetics) is an impressive creation, and thematically there's plenty to chew on here.

Tinja's mother, selfie-stick-wielding author of an insincere blog about "the lovely everyday life", is in her own way just as monstrous as the avian interloper – fake, self-centred and pushy. The hatchling represents an eruption of honesty in this

chocolate box world – and perhaps Tinja's rebellion against the "perfect daughter" role that's been assigned to her.

Her means of providing for this monstrous dependent – vomiting up food like a bird feeding its chick – brings to mind bulimia. And it comes as no great surprise when, glimpsing blood on Tinja's bedclothes, her father assumes that she's entered womanhood.

It may seem like an odd thing to say about a film with such an outlandish premise, but *Hatching* can feel a little predictable. As soon as the hatchling makes Tinja a gift of a dog which snapped at

“The screeching hatchling is an impressive creation”



50 minutes in a bathful of boiling water... yum.

her (like a cat bringing its owner a mouse), you know that any humans the tween harbours resentment for, such as her rival for the gymnastics team, are also under threat.

And the film's stylised look doesn't always work in its favour; the family's house is covered in bold wallpaper prints – everything is, quite literally, rosy – while a

hospital is rendered in pure, gleaming white. The fact that Tinja's bedroom is very clearly a set rather pushes itself into your consciousness. Then again, that artificiality and predictability are both, perhaps, simply in the nature of fairy tales. Ian Berriman

i The first draft script didn't include the social media aspect; the mother was just more generally keeping up appearances.





## INU-OH

### Noh great shakes

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 30 SEPTEMBER**  
TBC | 97 minutes

▶ Director Masaaki Yuasa  
▶ Cast Avu-Chan, Mirai Moriyama, Kenjiro Tsuda, Tasuku Emoto

➤ **Director Masaaki Yuasa** reunites with mangaka Taiyo Matsumoto for the first time since 2014's *Ping Pong*, turning Hideo Furukawa's historical novel into an anime rock musical. In the 14th century, blind travelling musician Tomona meets Inu-Oh, who was born physically deformed, with his limbs out of proportion and a face so frightening that he hides behind a mask.

Tomona realises that Inu-Oh is under a curse that can be broken when he sings and dances. Teaming up, their Noh performances became hugely popular, thereby attracting the attention of the Shogun – with disastrous consequences.

“Pedestrian plotting and weak musical numbers let it down”

*Inu-Oh* is a beautiful film, particularly in the first half. Matsumoto's art style, with its delicate, fluid and lively linework, is a delight. The figures contrast elegantly with the abstract brush strokes used to express how Tomona interprets the world, while backgrounds and kimonos are exquisitely detailed.

Unfortunately, the film is let down by pedestrian plotting and weak musical numbers. *Inu-Oh* is voiced by pop star Avu-Chan from the band Queen Bee, and the songs are all presented in an anachronistic modern rock style, complete with electric guitars and drums, rather than traditional instrumentation. The intention is to show how Tomona and Inu-Oh are boldly breaking with the Noh orthodoxy, yet the songs are flat and overlong. The dance numbers incorporate elements from Noh, breakdancing and ballet, but they can't rescue the plodding music.

*Inu-Oh* and Tomona's journey also lacks emotional resonance. A film that's visually delightful, but distinctly hollow. **David West**

**i** Ironically, dancer Mirai Moriyama voices gender-fluid Tomona, while transgender singer Avu-Chan is dancer Inu-Oh.



## ORPHAN: FIRST KILL

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**  
15 | 98 minutes

▶ Director William Brent Bell  
▶ Cast Isabelle Fuhrman, Julia Stiles, Rossif Sutherland, Matthew Finlan

➤ **You know that uncanny valley effect** you get from watching deepfakes? That's kind of what it feels like watching horror prequel *Orphan: First Kill*.

Isabelle Fuhrman is back as the murderous Esther, a psychopath with a glandular disorder that renders her permanently child-sized, but something's off. In the 2009 original, part of the fun of that audacious reveal was that Fuhrman was really a 10-year-old, playing an adult playing a child. Now, though, Fuhrman's in her mid-20s, so seeing her dressed up as a creepy kid is genuinely unsettling. Carefully chosen camera angles and child doubles almost convince, but it's still weird.

A better director maybe could have used that effect to his advantage, but William Brent Bell doesn't. As Esther worms her way into another unsuspecting family, he relies on under-lighting every scene to generate tension, making the whole production look like everyone's worrying about their electricity bill.

As with his previous film *Brahms: The Boy II*, Bell ensures every detail of the previous film is referenced and explained at tedious length; there's a big twist that livens things up for a while, but nothing here comes close to recapturing the gleeful mischief of the original. **Sarah Dobbs**



## ETERNAL 831

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 19 SEPTEMBER**  
TBC | 104 minutes

➤ **This chronically dull anime** features a Tokyo paperboy who freezes time at moments of stress, and realises other people are doing the same to strike blows against the authorities.

The film speaks to Japanese youth's feelings of helplessness about an unfair society, and has an unintended horrible topicality following the murder of Japan's former Prime Minister in June. However, even if you can tolerate the film's mechanically-moving CG characters, it's a sluggish, unrewarding story with a lame ending. **Andrew Osmond**



## THE RETALIATORS

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 14 SEPTEMBER**  
15 | 97 minutes

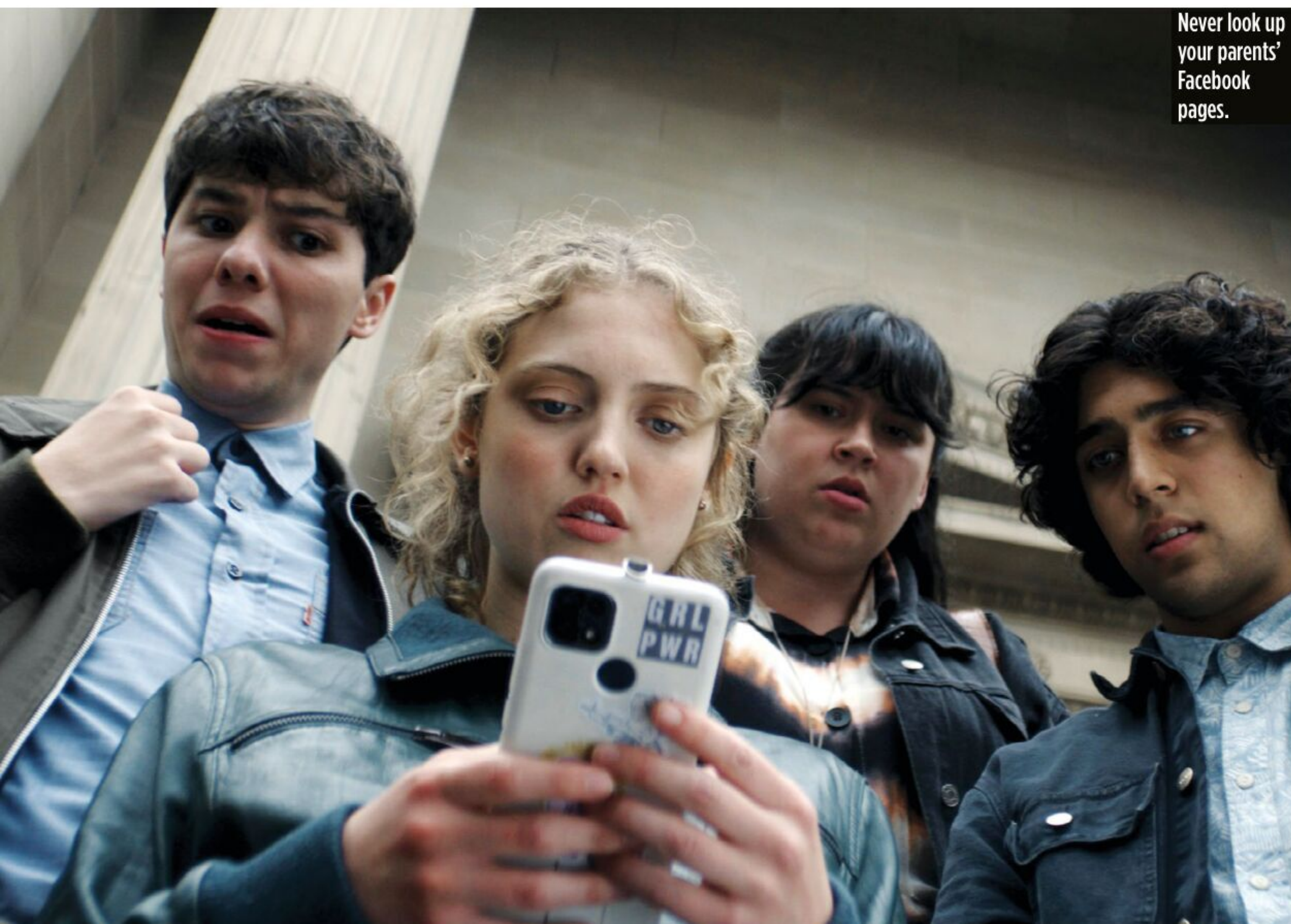
➤ **There are many good** reasons to make a movie, but "wanting to hang out with metal bands" isn't one.

In theory, *The Retaliators* is about revenge: offered the chance to torture the man who murdered his daughter, grieving dad Bishop (Michael Lombardi) must confront his own morality. But really, it's just a string of metal cameos, including Tommy Mötley Crüe, Papa Roach's Jacoby Shaddix, and all of Five Finger Death Punch. Problem is, none of those guys are actors, so this isn't much of a film. **Sarah Dobbs**



# Reviews

TV



## RED ROSE

### Caught in an app



UK BBC Three/streaming now  
on iPlayer

US Netflix, TBC

► Director The Clarkson Twins

► Cast Amelia Clarkson, Isis Hainsworth,  
Natalie Blair, Harry Redding, Ellis  
Howard, Ali Khan

**EPISODES 1.01-1.08 Kids today, eh?**

Never off their phones! Well, maybe *Red Rose* will scare them into taking their eyes off the smallest screen, at least for 40-ish minutes at a time. It could almost play as a series of public information films, warning teens of the dangers of being too online.

In Bolton, best friends Wren, Rochelle, Ashley, Noah, Antony and Taz have just finished their GCSEs and are facing a long

summer of parties and part-time jobs. Then Roch downloads the mysterious Red Rose app, and things get weird. One by one, her friends get drawn into the mystery. Who created the app? How does it work? And most importantly, how do you make it stop?

Horror movies about evil apps abound nowadays (*Countdown*, *i-Lived*, *Bedeveled...*), and they're mostly unwatchable. *Red Rose* bests them all by doing two things really well: constructing some genuinely chilling horror, and

**“Each teen has his or her own set of hopes, fears, and traumas”**

creating a likeable group of characters who seem like they really care about one another – and so, by extension, make us care about them.

Nailing the creepy tone of the show is a serious feat, especially considering this is a BBC production aimed at a young audience. There's an all-pervasive atmosphere of dread throughout – impressively, considering it mostly manifests as text on a screen, *Red Rose* always feels properly threatening.

Perhaps the one misstep the show makes is attempting a double climax: things come to a head in episode five, calm down in episode six, and then ramp back up again, bigger and nastier than before, for the final two episodes. If episode five had actually been the end, the threat would've felt credibly grim; the actual ending is a bit more implausible, however.

What helps sell it, though, is how well-realised the characters are. Each teen has his or her own set of hopes, fears, and traumas as

## DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

An eerie, slowed-down cover version of a nonsense '90s pop song plays.

Someone says “Crazy always wins”.

Wren wanders off by herself, despite everyone asking her not to.



The kids drink something they don't like the taste of.

A phone's notification beep is treated like a jump scare violin screech.

Taz is (justifiably, in most cases) told to shut up.

The gang play a game of Guess Who?

they attempt to balance their lives (school, friendships, love, sex) with the pressures put on them by their parents; they're so well written and performed that each of them feels like someone you could sit next to on the train. Creators Michael and Paul Clarkson grew up in Bolton, and their familiarity with the city gives the on-screen version the ring of authenticity. (Though whether or not real teens make a round of tea in a crisis is a question we'll have to leave to the 16-year-olds.)

As a cautionary tale about our over-reliance on technology, *Red Rose* makes a good fist of it – it'll definitely make you extra suspicious of anything with Wi-Fi connectivity. But where it really shines is in its portrayal of teenage friendship. Does anyone ever really have friends like the ones they had when they were 16? If *Red Rose* is anything to go by, probably not. **Sarah Dobbs**

**i** The Clarksons started out making parody videos on YouTube – you can still find their stuff there, under BoxStepProductions.



## WESTWORLD Season Four Our Friends Electric

★★★★★

UK Sky Atlantic/NOW, streaming now

US HBO, streaming now

► Showrunners Jonathan Nolan, Lisa Joy

► Cast Evan Rachel Wood, Tessa

Thompson, Thandiwe Newton,

Jeffrey Wright, Aaron Paul, Ed Harris

**EPISODES 4.01-4.08** **Anyone who has** stuck with *Westworld* through three seasons of philosophical musings on free will and confusing timelines must be in it for the long haul – and season four certainly repays that time commitment, with the best eight episodes since the initial run.

As we soon learn, it takes place seven years after the war between humans and Hosts. One of the season's central mysteries is the

identity of Christina (Evan Rachel Wood), a new character who works as a writer creating stories for videogames – and who also looks exactly like a brunette Dolores. But Dolores is dead, isn't she? Or is she Hale now? Hang on, let's check the recap...

Of course, this confusion as to who is who, and exactly which timeline we're in, is meat and drink to the show, but season four eventually delivers far more answers than questions and has a hell of a good time while doing it. The production values remain

**“Delivers far more answers than questions”**



exquisite, and while dialogue sometimes veers towards the cheesily generic, it's never glaring enough to make you wince.

There's no room here for *Lost*-style flashback interludes – every episode drives the narrative relentlessly forward. Talking of *Lost*, there are at least two whopping great Moments of the “We must go back to the island” calibre, and the finale is

audacious in its totality. But creators Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy said from the start that they had planned for five seasons, and so it seems the next (as yet unconfirmed) will be the last. If it can match the narrative oomph of this one, it'll be a hell of a way to go out. **Ed Ricketts**

**i** Aurora Perrineau, who plays C, is the daughter of Harold Perrineau – Michael in *Lost*, and now in *From* as Sheriff Boyd.

## SURREALESTATE Season One Crucifix-er uppers

★★★★★

UK Sky Sci-Fi/streaming on NOW

US Syfy, finished airing

► Showrunner George R Olson

► Cast Tim Rozon, Sarah Levy, Adam

Korson, Maurice Dean Wint

**EPISODES 1.01-1.10** **Selling a house** can be traumatic at the best of times – considerably more so when that house is haunted. Which is where real estate agent Luke Roman and his specialist team come in handy: they give your property a paranormal enema, then sell the place.

Luke's team includes a pyrokinetic deal-closer, a gay, ex-priest expert in paranormal lore, a British tech guy who's swallowed a book of quotations,

and a surly, gothy office manager. Each week they exorcise a house blighted by some unconvincing, low-rent gore and creature effects, directed with all the tension of a soggy kitchen towel. There's also an arc plot involving Roman's family lineage and a hellhole in his girlfriend's house, which provides some moderately interesting twists along the way.

Full marks to *SurrealEstate* for coming up with a new twist on the haunted house genre; it's just a shame the show doesn't do anything particularly exciting with it. Possibly the creepiest thing about the show is Luke himself. Played by *Wynonna Earp*'s Tim Rozon, he's a weird mix of used car salesman, long-lost Corleone



brother, Eddie Munster and Roy Orbison. He can talk to ghosts, and regularly hooks up with his dead dad to shoot the breeze.

Amazingly, all the women in the show think he's a real charmer. But while Rozon was just that as Doc Holliday in *Earp*, there's something about the whole Luke persona – the clothes, the manner, the mumbling, the too-obvious hair dye – that's downright

unsettling. What keeps the series watchable are the supporting characters, who provide some much-needed quirkiness and fun.

By all means arrange a viewing, then, but don't expect *SurrealEstate* to be the ghost house of your dreams.

**Dave Golder**

**i** Tim Rozon's former *Wynonna Earp* co-star Melanie Scrofano guest stars in one episode, and also directs two more.





## FOR ALL MANKIND Season Three

★★★★★

▶ UK/US Apple TV+, streaming now

▶ Showrunners Ronald D Moore, Matt Wolpert, Ben Nedivi

▶ Cast Joel Kinnaman, Shantel VanSanten, Jodi Balfour, Krys Marshall

**EPISODES 1.01-1.10** As the makers of *John Carter* can attest, Mars hasn't always been a happy hunting ground for Hollywood. Luckily, the third season of this alternative history of the space race breaks the curse of the red planet, and cements its status as one of the best shows on TV along the way.

A time jump of decade-sized proportions propels the drama into the mid-'90s, where NASA's prime directive is sending astronauts to Mars. This time, however, they're not just competing with the USSR, because a Steve Jobs-style disruptor has designs on getting the private sector there first.

With more time having elapsed since the twist that established *For All Mankind's* parallel timeline, the plot is inevitably drifting further and further into sci-fi territory. But despite the accelerated technological advances, there are enough nods to the '90s era in which it's set – including virtual cameos for Bill Clinton – to keep things grounded. The show also gets maximum mileage out of its brilliant premise, riffing on history to highlight issues that feel particularly relevant in 2022.

Fundamentally, however, it remains an unashamed celebration of the miracle of spaceflight, and the genius and bravery of the people who make it happen. **Richard Edwards**



Come to Wookey Hole, it's fun for all the family.

## THE ORVILLE: NEW HORIZONS

You are Orville... but I like you

★★★★★

UK Disney+ streaming now

US Hulu, streaming now

▶ Showrunner Seth MacFarlane

▶ Cast Seth MacFarlane, Adrienne Palicki, Penny Johnson Jerald, Mark Jackson

**EPISODES 3.01-3.10** *The Orville* has always been *Trek*, Jim, but not as we know it. Is it a homage? A parody? A rip-off? A home for disaffected *Trek* fans, narked by current "real" *Trek's* alleged abrogation of Gene Roddenberry's original vision?

Season three confuses things further by slashing the humour quotient to a bare minimum. Honestly, *Strange New Worlds* has a higher quip rate, and it's also doing a great job winning back those disaffected fans. So what is the point of *The Orville* any more?

Does there have to be one? You could argue that *SNW* is a modern take on *TOS*, while *The Orville* is *TNG* in spirit, but honestly, the main reason for *The Orville*

continuing is that it's really bloody entertaining in its own right.

Sure, the newly bloated running times for each episode lead to moments of cringey indulgence (do we really need Molloy's wimpy songs *in their entirety*?) and most would benefit from some judicious trimming for pace. Its cheery optimism about human nature occasionally borders on a cheesiness that's less likely now to be balanced by some well-aimed zingers. But mostly, *The Orville* is a well-told series of gripping sci-fi morality plays, with its heart in the right place, boasting some stunning visuals. Hell, "Domino" has sequences that are the nearest TV's ever come to the rush of *Star Wars*-style space action (and that includes Disney's own various *Star Wars* series).

Plus, it's still very funny when it wants to be. It just doesn't need to be any more. **Dave Golder**

**i** If there's a fourth season, Norm MacDonald will sadly not be returning to voice Yaphit, as he died at the end of 2021.



## LOCKE & KEY Season Three

★★★★★

▶ UK/US Netflix, streaming now

▶ Showrunners Carlton Cuse, Meredith Averill

▶ Cast Emilia Jones, Connor Jessup, Darby Stanchfield, Jackson Robert Scott

**EPISODES 3.01-3.10** The final

season of *Locke & Key* provides a satisfying but nigglingly unambitious conclusion to the saga of the Locke family and their magical keys. It thrills, it performs closure, and it provides a farewell tour for some beloved characters, but it rarely hits you with a proper wow factor.

With Dodge dead, the main threat this time comes from Kevin Durand's Frederick Gideon, a British soldier from the American Revolutionary War, reanimated by an even more powerful demonic force from Dodge's realm. There are a couple of new keys, plus some time travel, body-swapping and a couple of surprise returnees.

But certain plot strands – Tyler's missing memories, the effects of the time travel, the fate of a couple of characters – feel undercooked or summarily dismissed once they've dramatically run their course, the final confrontation is underwhelming, and the fate of the keys just a little too neat.

There's still a lot to enjoy here though, especially the surprisingly touching fate of a very peripheral character, and the psychedelic effects of when you use the Head Key to go inside someone's mind and they're killed. But it feels like a good time to end, before someone finds a franchise-milking key... **Dave Golder**



## DAY OF THE DEAD

### Romero's spinning in his grave



UK Sky Sci-Fi, Mondays/  
streaming on NOW

US Syfy, finished airing

Showrunners Jed Elinoff,  
Scott Thomas

Cast Miranda Frigon, Dejan Loyola,  
Natalie Malaika, Keenan Tracey

**EPISODES 1.01-1.10** In the seventh episode of Syfy's riff on George Romero, a key character is cremated in a bin. The moment is foreshadowed in nearly every scene leading up to it, as this series is the dictionary definition of a dumpster fire.

Almost every element, from the acting to the editing, the score to the script, sucks harder than a zombie holding a skull and a straw. It would be unwatchable if it wasn't for the practical effects, which are fantastic. The gore gags bubble up like geysers, and the

zombies are varied and fun – especially this show's takes on Dr Tongue, and the ever-loveable Bub. We have Steven Kostanski of production company Astron-6 to thank for those elements: he directs four episodes, and executive-produces the whole thing. If only he could have brought some of Astron-6's *Psycho Goreman*'s signature humour to the project, because the only laughs here are unintentional or awkward.

We've avoided discussing the plot – which bears practically no relation to the film from which the show takes its name – because that's the worst part. During an election year, a small town is

**“The dictionary definition of a dumpster fire”**



divided over some local fracking, which releases an ancient disease dating back to America's first settlers. A group of strangers band together to survive the subsequent army of the dead, bickering and making right-wing jokes ("How's the Second Amendment taste, motherf\*\*kers?" is one of the first lines). Every episode has a soap opera structure, with a wedding a central (and unintentionally

hilarious) driving narrative, making you feel like you've switched over to *Neighbours* halfway through. The zombies are great, but they're mostly relegated to the background. Basically, it makes *Day Of The Dead* (2008) look like *Day Of The Dead* (1985). Avoid at all costs. **Sam Ashurst**

**i** *Day Of The Dead* is also now available to buy as a Blu-ray, DVD and download. We've really sold it to you, right?

## THE GIRL IN THE MIRROR Season One

### Inversion Of The Body Snatchers



UK/US Netflix, streaming now

Showrunner Sergio G Sánchez

Cast Mireia Oriol, Álex Villazán,  
Claudia Roset, Pol Monen

**EPISODES 1.01-1.09** When a bus full of students crashes off a fog-swamped road in a mountainous region of northern Spain, there are few survivors. And those that do survive seem different. Though they still rut with each other like rabbits, same as before.

Alma is one survivor, but she's lost her memory. As she struggles to piece together her pre-crash persona, she apparently starts seeing the ghost of her sister, who died of brain cancer. At the same time, other survivors, including

Alma's potential boyfriend Tom, begin to realise that the crash was no accident, and has something to do with body-snatching demons from ancient myth.

*Alma*, incidentally, is also the original Spanish title of this series. Luckily it remains on-screen in its intended stylised form (with *The Girl In The Middle* as a subtitle), as it's the basis for a clever meta gag in a later episode, and – as the series goes on – links into the whole mirror motif in far more subtle ways than the on-the-nose English title.

The series boasts some excellently crafted horror set-pieces and moments of exquisite tension, along with a bunch of wonderfully ludicrous



twists. Two high-concept episodes that turn everything on its head certainly liven up the latter part.

But oh dear, getting there is a right old slog. Dull teen relationship traumas and an unrelentingly dour tone drag listlessly through the first six episodes, interrupted only by infodumping flashbacks that sketch out a creakily contrived backstory for the demons. There's

a checklist of dark fantasy paraphernalia: ancient tomes, sigils and a mysterious device that serves no purpose other than advancing the plot at a crucial point. Be prepared for some industrial-strength mawkishness too. It might have been better off as a 90-minute film. **Dave Golder**

**i** Writer/director Sergio G Sánchez scripted director JA Bayona's highly regarded Spanish 2007 horror film *The Orphanage*.





"Looks like the Himalayas."  
"Do you want Tibet?"

## DOCTOR WHO: THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMEN

Too Much Monk-y Business

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1967/2022 PG Blu-ray/DVD

► Director **Gerald Blake, Chloe Grech, Gary Russell**

► Cast **Patrick Troughton, Frazer Hines, Deborah Watling, Jack Watling**

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** "The Web Of Fear", the second outing for *Doctor Who*'s cuddliest monsters the Yeti, got a home entertainment release eight years ago. Now their origin story follows suit, with the six-parter's missing five episodes reconstructed via animation.

Set in Tibet in the '30s, it sees the Second Doctor, Jamie and Victoria visiting a monastery, as the usually shy, retiring creatures inexplicably turn violent.

The central concept – robotic Yeti animated by shiny metal

spheres, controlled by the disembodied Great Intelligence – is strong. But there's altogether too much material which doesn't advance the plot, with the time-travellers repeatedly falling under suspicion, numerous slowly enunciated villainous monologues (admittedly, it remains a joy to hear "Doc-torrrr" delivered in an evil whisper), and the precise nature of the Intelligence's "great experiment" frustratingly unclear. If you're foolish enough to consume all six parts in one setting, it can be a bit of a slog.

All the same, there are a handful of delightful Troughton moments here, like the Doctor hastily beating a retreat when Jamie proposes a plan, or declaring that some marauding Yeti "came to get their ball back".

Don't expect a faithful evocation of what viewers might have seen in 1967. For starters, the production's casting of white actors as Tibetan monks ("aided" by elastic around their heads) has been updated; the voices of British thespians such as Norman Jones are retained, but their likenesses are not. This seems fair enough.

The supersizing of the climax, with a mental battle expanded to include levitation and unearthly wind, is more questionable, though it's undeniably more dramatic than the original stare-off. The one outright error comes in episode three, with a scene set outside despite the surrounding dialogue making it clear there are orders preventing the Doctor and co from leaving the monastery – a baffling gaffe.

► **Extras** Choose between widescreen/colour animation, a 4:3/monochrome crop, or reconstructions which utilise off-screen "telesnaps".

Making Of "Troughton In Tibet" (37 minutes) once again uses the clever tactic of taking cast and crew to a filming location, then prompting reminiscences with behind-the-scenes photos. Here it's Frazer "Jamie" Hines and make-up supervisor Sylvia James (plus a Police Box) in Snowdonia; impressively, they even manage to identify specific rocks. The drone footage is stunning, and the results are really rather heartwarming. Freshly shot talking heads and archive footage add another 11 voices to the mix.

With living witnesses to the making of '60s *Who* increasingly thin on the ground, moderator Toby Hadoke turns to people who can't really remember these episodes for two commentaries: director's assistant Judy Shears and camera assistant Bernie Newman. That's fine if you're fascinated by vague general reminiscences of working for the Beeb in the '60s; if it's specific *Who* anecdotes you care about, head for the surviving episode two, which teams Frazer Hines and camera assistant John Walker.

The duo also chat, somewhat less productively, over the animated episode four. Animation producer Gary Russell justifies his decisions on two more tracks, while special sound wizard Bryan Hodgson and Sylvia James pair up on another. (Seven? Yes, they made an animated version of the surviving episode too...)

Commentary by Deborah Watling (Victoria) is carried over from 2004's *Lost In Time* DVD, as are 8mm footage shot by the director and 15 seconds of surviving clips from episode four. Plus: more brief 8mm location footage, shot by Frazer Hines (highlight: a privates-caught-in-clapperboard gag); brief snippets of writer Mervyn Haisman from BSB's 1990 *Doctor Who* weekend (three minutes); gallery; PDFs of production docs; trailer. **Ian Berriman**

i Director Gerald Blake carried a bottle of vodka on location, allowing Troughton and Hines occasional nips to keep warm.





## STRAWBERRY MANSION

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 16 SEPTEMBER  
2022 | 12A | VOD

Also in selected cinemas  
▶ Directors Albert Birney,  
Kentucker Audley

➔ **What if dreams were taxed?**  
That's the premise underlying this oddball indie, which somehow manages to major on sugary quirk without triggering a gag reflex.

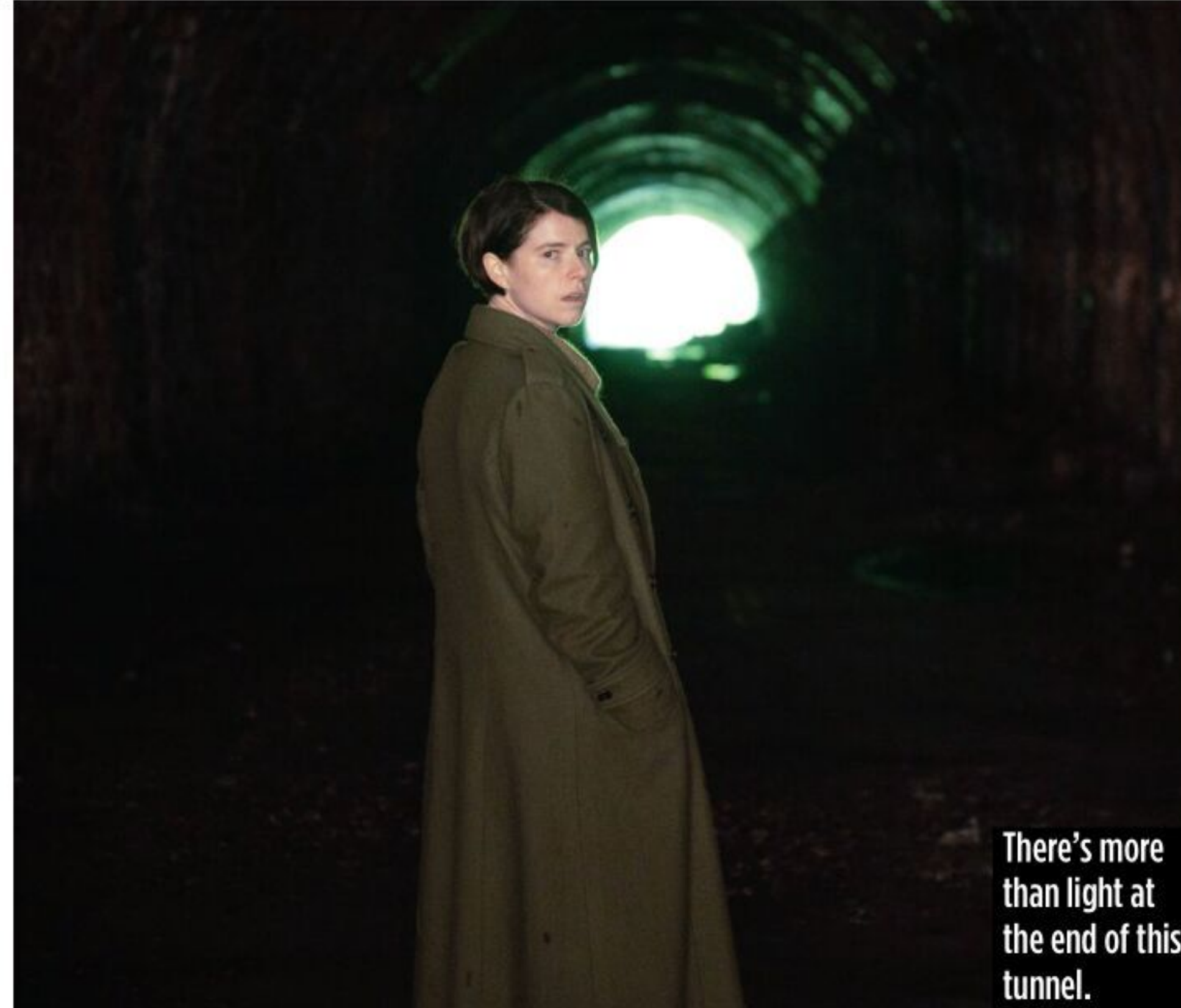
Not a concept explored with any depth, it's mainly a pretext for placing taxman James Preble (Kentucker Audley) in the home of Arabella Isadora (Penny Fuller), a bohemian elder who should feel familiar to fans of *Harold And Maude*. In the process of auditing old videos of Bella's dreams, he falls for her younger self.

The DIY aesthetic – tech built from trash (a VR helmet appears to be based on a kitchen bin), crudely-made masks (a saxophone-playing frog is a stand-out), and extras covered in grass or VHS tape – brings to mind a Flaming Lips video that's somehow swelled to feature length. It's definitely a cheapskate affair, but also visually imaginative.

It doesn't matter that during a dream where the auditor's deluged by pastel-coloured plastics you can see the peeling paint on the falling trash – the image still impresses. And the central romance – which suggests that love can transcend age, time, death and the gulf between dreams and reality – is sweetly charming.

Endearingly ramshackle, surreally romantic and childlike in the most positive sense.

Ian Berriman



There's more than light at the end of this tunnel.

## MEN Face your demons

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Alex Garland

▶ Cast Jessie Buckley, Rory Kinnear,  
Paapa Essiedu, Gayle Rankin

➔ **Enigma, unpredictability and**  
natural beauty combine with powerful – yet also, on occasion, amusingly absurd – results in Alex Garland's weird mythic parable about male misbehaviour, mental trauma and healing.

Jessie Buckley is Harper, who sojourns in a Hertfordshire village as a means of dealing with a devastating personal tragedy. The country house and its surroundings are idyllic, but the locals are uniquely disquieting: all the menfolk have Rory Kinnear's face. And soon a sinister naked figure is shadowing her...

Harper doesn't comment on or react to the ubiquity of Kinnear's visage, so its status is uncertain – as is much else. Clearly, the writer/director is playing with the notion of toxic masculinity in its various forms and degrees, but a precise meaning lies out of reach. Garland has his view, but is keeping it to himself; "It's a

conversation, not a lecture", he has stated.

What's crystal clear is the quality of both Buckley's performance – at times, distressingly unrestrained – and the cinematography. These combine very memorably in a 12-minute walk which acts as a showcase for both the English countryside's restorative charms and the actor's ability to slide from joyous wonder to rising panic.

With Garland wrong-footing the audience via some unorthodox choices – when the film's at its most intensely grotesque, it becomes strangely calm, even contemplative – it makes for a fascinatingly bewildering puzzle, one which lingers in the mind.

➔ **Extras** A 24-minute Making Of interviews the writer/director and his leads, painting a picture of a highly collaborative production (Garland stresses that he's no auteur). It's a thoughtful piece, with behind-the-scenes glimpses of the gobsmacking finale, but this level of craft really warranted more detailed examination. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Kinnear wrote mini-biographies for all his characters – the policeman, for example, was "secretly googling hair transplants".



## DAY SHIFT

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2022 | 18 | SVOD

▶ Director JJ Perry

▶ Cast Jamie Foxx, Dave Franco,  
Karla Souza, Snoop Dogg

**NETFLIX** **Captured in hyperreal**  
colour, the palms, pools and billboards of the sun-drenched San Fernando Valley feel like a counterintuitive choice for a movie about the undead. But it suits the mood of *Day Shift*, a breezy, vampire-slaying comedy-adventure where the essential weirdness of LA pops on the screen just as much as the landscape.

A blue-collar Blade, Jamie Foxx is Bud Jablonski, a pool cleaner with a side-hustle in fang-busting. Already struggling with bills and family relationships, he faces a power grab by local revenants, led by Karla Souza's scheming real estate agent Audrey.

The film is the directing debut of martial artist and stuntman JJ Perry, who transfers those skills to create close-quarters fight scenes that are thrilling, funny and inventive. And there's some admirable vampiric world-building, too – split into castes, from Ubers to Spiders, Easterns to Southern, they survive sunlight with the aid of high-powered sunscreen, made from the shell of the desert tortoise, illegal in 40 countries.

At times the glibness is exhausting, and a *Grand Theft Auto*-style slice of vehicular mayhem is the least interesting thing here. But all is forgiven for the sheer, life-affirming joy of seeing Snoop Dogg unleash a Gatling gun flamethrower on the forces of darkness.

Nick Setchfield





## SECRET HEADQUARTERS

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

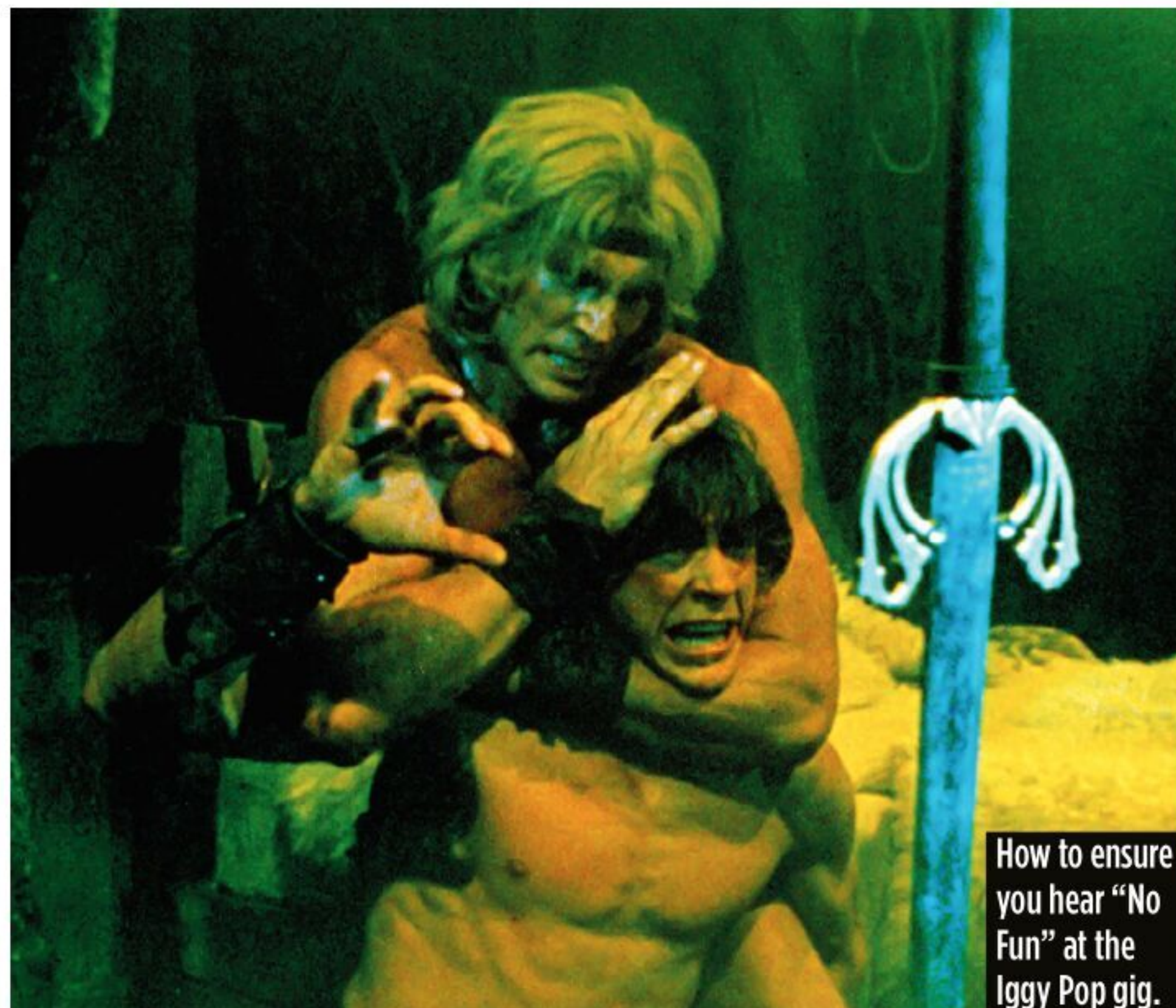
▶ Directors Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman

▶ Cast Owen Wilson, Michael Peña, Walker Scobell, Jesse Williams

**PARAMOUNT+** With a seemingly infinite amount of superhero IP still to be plundered by Hollywood, it feels just a little perverse to create your own. But here's Owen Wilson as do-gooder the Guard, whose tireless pursuit of truth and justice impacts his relationship with his young son, Charlie.

In truth Wilson is an absent father in this kid-friendly romp, only significantly entering the action in the final act. The essential fantasy at the heart of the story isn't so much "What if my dad was a superhero?" but "What if my dad was a superhero and had a hidden lair filled with seriously cool shit?" More man cave than Batcave, it even boasts vintage arcade cabinets and snack vending machines alongside the extraterrestrial gizmology.

Playing as a mash-up of *Spy Kids* and *Home Alone* when it could have been *Unbreakable Jr*, *Secret Headquarters* bears the stamp of Jerry Bruckheimer but is far from the adrenaline-shot cinema that made his name (originally targeting a theatrical release, it then made the shift to streaming). From the aesthetics to the action it feels all too underpowered, not helped by Wilson's superhero, whose tech-suited schtick feels so familiar you suspect the Stark Industries serial numbers have been filed off along the way. **Nick Setchfield**



How to ensure you hear "No Fun" at the Iggy Pop gig.

## DEATHSTALKER/ DEATHSTALKER II

Conan The Vulgarian

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1983/1987 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors James "John Watson" Sbardellati, Jim Wynorski

▶ Cast Rick Hill, Barbi Benton, John Terlesky, Monique Gabrielle

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** In the 1980s, legendary B-movie mogul Roger Corman produced a string of films in Argentina, of which trashy Conan-alike *Deathstalker* was the first.

By Crom, the casual misogyny makes it painful to watch today. It's the tale of a barbarian outlaw who reluctantly goes questing for the magic items needed to defeat sorcerer Munkar. It's fast-paced and brutal, but gratuitous nudity ruins almost every scene. One sure path to alcohol poisoning would be to chug a drink every time a woman is tied up, stripped and threatened with sexual assault.

The lead is recast for the sequel. Rick Hill is replaced by John Terlesky, who plays the character

as more of a wisecracking thief. *Deathstalker II* reinvents the franchise as a lightweight parody of the swords-and-sorcery genre. Fights are slapstick, jokes are anachronistic, and there are nods to Indiana Jones, James Bond and '60s Batman.

There's some questionable acting on display, but people do at least seem to be having fun this time, giving it the vibe of a *Carry On* movie. It's impossible to describe *Deathstalker II* as good, but it is at least much less mean-spirited than the original. **+** **Extras** Each film is accompanied by an amiable commentary track with its director and a couple of cast/crew; make-up expert John Carl Buechler died in 2019, so you can tell that these aren't new.

You also get an image gallery for the first movie, and theatrical trailers for both films.

**Dave Bradley**

**i** The mounted guards in *Deathstalker* were Argentinian cops and their horses that the crew had met in the street nearby.



## MAZES AND MONSTERS

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 19 SEPTEMBER**

1982 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Steven Hilliard Stern

▶ Cast Tom Hanks, Wendy Crewson, David Wysocki, Chris Makepeace

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** Wait, that Tom

Hanks? Really? Yes indeed, Hollywood's Nicest Leading Man™ caught an early break with this made-for-TV movie about the perils of playing too much *Dungeons & Dragons* – or rather *Mazes And Monsters*, as it's cheekily renamed here.

Hanks is Robbie, a gifted student starting at university and looking for new friends. He joins a *M&M* group with Jay Jay, Kate and Daniel, but when Jay Jay suggests taking things to the next level – basically LARPing in some nearby caves – Robbie starts to connect too deeply with his character and sees terrifying creatures around every corner.

Despite its rep as a piece of Satanic Panic-era propaganda, *Mazes And Monsters* is actually kinda interesting (if not actually, y'know, that good). The cast are solid, and while it obviously views roleplaying with suspicion, the film is more about parental pressure and undiagnosed mental illness than yelling at kids. It's no classic, but a little-seen and idiosyncratic curiosity.

**+** **Extras** Podcasters and RPG experts Seth Skorkowsky, Scott Dorward, Joe Trier, Veronica Escamilla-Brady and Eoghan Falvey give the film a thorough roasting in the commentary track. Plus: an eight-page booklet with text by critic Dan Jolin.

**Will Salmon**





## SAMARITAN

### Hero takes a fall

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

► Directors **Julius Avery**

► Cast **Sylvester Stallone, Javon Walton, Dascha Polanco, Pilou Asbæk**

**PRIME** Hitching his star to the superhero genre, Sylvester Stallone brings an entire Slyverse of established personas to the screen, from underdog pugilist Rocky to one-man army Rambo.

He needs that accumulated iconhood, as the superpowered players in this story are thinly sketched to the point of utterly generic: Samaritan and Nemesis, twin brothers and sworn enemies, engaged in a fraternal battle of good versus evil across urban hellhole Granite City. All that is dealt with in the title sequence: this is the twilight years sequel to the film you never saw.

Directed by Julius Avery, who brought us 2018's well-received Nazi zombie horror *Overlord*, *Samaritan* has the feel of a classic VHS actioner. Its mid-tier budget keeps it focused on street-level thuggery, and Stallone is essentially an ageing urban vigilante in hoodie and beanie, dispensing the kind of rough justice that has you cheering in a post-pub glow.

But for all its low-rent Golan-Globus vibe, this is a film whose heart is in the right place, sketching a genuinely touching relationship between Stallone's weary Dark Knight and his young Robin, played with appealing earnestness by *The Umbrella Academy*'s Javon Walton.

**Nick Setchfield**

**i** Written as a spec script, *Samaritan* was adapted as a series of Mythos Comics graphic novels back in 2014.

Modern dance can be so intellectually challenging.



## TORN HEARTS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | Download

➔ **Country megastar Harper Dutch** lost her fame and fortune after her sister's untimely death. But when two bright-eyed wannabes show up at her crumbling mansion proposing a collaboration, she decides it's time for a comeback...

Part *Sunset Boulevard*, part *Nashville*, all simmering resentment and barely suppressed violence, Brea Grant's follow-up to *12 Hour Shift* is a dark satire of the music industry – with lashings of gothic melodrama. A bourbon and blood-soaked delight. **Sarah Dobbs**



## SALOUM

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 8 SEPTEMBER**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

**SHUDDER** Senegal is the real star of *Saloum*, which begins as a crime thriller, then takes an abrupt turn into horror territory. As three Tarantino-cool mercenaries hide out in the titular delta region, there are stunning vistas to savour.

It's technically accomplished, with a terrific score by French composer Reksider. The supernatural elements are rather less successful, with the lore under-explained, and characters repeatedly shooting at CG swarms – behaviour which can't help but feel bafflingly pointless. **Calvin Baxter**



## GLORIOUS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

**SHUDDER** Centred on a pair of characters in a grotty rest-stop bathroom, either side of a glory hole, this brief two-hander (mostly) is ick-inducing – but not in *that* way.

*True Blood*'s Ryan Kwanten is Wes, who finds that the well-spoken voice in the next stall (JK Simmons) belongs to a Lovecraftian demi-god... What does it want from him?

More effects-heavy than you may expect, it's divertingly odd, with some wryly amusing moments, but rather too silly to have any real impact.

**Ian Berriman**



## SO VAM

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

**SHUDDER** Up-and-coming drag queen Kurt Lindqvist is used to school bullies, but unprepared for what happens when evil vampire Landon gets his teeth into him. With a little help from some new bigot-eating friends, though, things are soon looking up – who knew vampirism could be so empowering?

It's probably best to go into this Australian cheapie aware it was directed by a 17-year-old. Knowing that, it becomes a impressive wish-fulfilment fantasy; otherwise, it's got too many rough edges and dodgy performances. **Sarah Dobbs**



## STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE THE DIRECTOR'S EDITION

Cloud computing

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1979/2022 | PG | 4K Blu-ray  
(dual format)

▶ Director **Robert Wise**

▶ Cast **William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelly, James Doohan**

➔ **Too long. Too slow. Too ponderous.** The consensus on *Trek*'s big-screen debut is hard to argue with. Returning James T Kirk to the captain's chair to investigate a killer cloud en route for Earth, its longueurs are sometimes excusable – in 1979,

dewy-eyed fans were probably perfectly content to see several minutes lavished on Enterprise-in-space-dock eye candy.

However, the sequences showcasing the baroque interiors of the mysterious V'Ger feel more akin to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and reduce an iconic cast (who should be busy sparking off one another) to passive observers gazing at a viewscreen. Only when Kirk gambles the fate of humanity on a bluff do you really feel the spirit of '60s *Star Trek* asserting itself.

A dissatisfied Robert Wise revisited the film in 2001 for a Director's Edition re-edit, which also added new effects. This 4K remaster reworks that, recompositing '70s effects elements and redoing the 2001 CGI. There are tiny tweaks too: reversing a shot of Kirk so he leans forward, not back; fixing a continuity error where Spock and McCoy's jackets got swapped. Generally it just looks crisper. The most noticeable refresh is a shot of the V'ger ship approaching Earth, now considerably more detailed and colourful. If you didn't object to the 2001 cut, you're unlikely to be offended by this one.

➔ **Extras** On the standard release you get the *Director's Edition* in 4K, with two audio commentaries (one by the remastering team is new), text commentary and a Blu-ray disc of extras. New additions here include "The Human Adventure" (48 minutes), a decent eight-part doc. Regularly punctuated by original effects plates, it switches between sometimes dryly technical discussion of the remastering and more engaging subjects such as how Wise and co conceived V'ger, and Jerry Goldsmith's score.

Five minutes of costume tests include delightful glimpses of two Andorians and a Betelgeusian ambassador, plus a bizarre "caveman Spock" concept. Three deleted scenes (three minutes) see Scotty threatening to put Ilia's replica in a scrap compactor, and V'ger's probe killing a crewman. You also get three minutes of raw effects dailies, and another three of the graphics that were projected onto computer screens. Various archival bonuses are included too.

Splash out on five-disc box set *The Complete Adventure* and you also get 4K discs of the Theatrical Cut and the extended 1983 TV edit (now in widescreen), plus swag like a booklet of archival material, a mini-poster, and four art cards. Best of all are the reproductions of 1979 merch: four bumper stickers ("Federation vehicle, official use only") and a sticker sheet of the art for six "instant stained glass" transfers. Cute! **Ian Berriman**

**i** Also out: *The Original Motion Picture Collection*, a 15-disc box set of the first six *Trek* movies; *V* and *VI* debut on 4K.



## SMUT WITHOUT SMUT Volume One

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 12 SEPTEMBER**

1973/1976 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors **Godfrey Daniels,**

**Derek Todd**

▶ Cast **John Alderman, Denise Drake, Barbara Fisk, Jim Curtis**

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** This double-

header Blu-ray presents two grindhouse obscurities in both vicar-friendly and filthy versions. In the name of critical rigour *SFX* naturally watched the latter.

*The Dirty Dolls* is a ragged gals 'n' guns exploitationer, with edgy but oddly half-hearted bouts of rumpo. *Things To Come*, by contrast, is bursting with ideas. Other people's ideas, but still.

Set in a dystopia where the population's kept passive by TV, there are echoes of everything from *A Clockwork Orange* and *THX 1138* to *Westworld* (the title's nicked from HG Wells). Genuine ambition simmers beneath the skin-flick surface. Location filming makes good use of '70s steel-and-glass modernism, and the storytelling has a self-aware wit: sex scenes are contextualised as clips from the "porn operas" fed to the unthinking audience.

For many the true turn-on will be the grindhouse aesthetic. But your inner Tarantino will be left desiring more than the fetishisation of forgotten cinema.

➔ **Extras** Choose between uncut or cut versions of both *The Dirty Dolls* (73 minutes/50 minutes) and *Things To Come* (97 minutes/72 minutes). There's also commentary on the latter by the American Genre Film Archive team. **Nick Setchfield**



PARAMOUNT/ALAMY





## ALL MY FRIENDS HATE ME

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray & DVD

(dual format)

▶ Director Andrew Gaynord

▶ Cast Tom Stourton, Charly Clive, Georgina Campbell, Antonia Clarke

➔ **Is this a horror film?** It's been discussed as such. And it certainly plays with genre tropes: at one point, its hero even gets chased by someone wielding an axe. But it's much more a comedy of manners.

When Pete (Tom Stourton) meets up with old uni friends at a country house to celebrate his birthday, their relentless teasing and suspicious references to an imminent "surprise" fuel his paranoia. And why is local interloper Harry so familiar?

Cleverly scripted to leave the viewer siding with Pete while always allowing for an innocent explanation, it boasts some excellent performances – Graham Dickson stands out as Archie, a coked-up toff who remains sympathetic.

But a horror film? Not really. The nearest thing to a scare comes in one of Pete's anxiety dreams. It's far more likely to make you cringe than shudder.

➔ **Extras** The director and writers provide commentary. A screening Q&A (26 minutes) discusses "much bigger" draft endings – in one, Pete, tripping on acid, shot his girlfriend. A deleted scene sets the tone by having Pete's partner mess with him; a longer ending was wisely abbreviated. Galleries present an early draft, producer/director notes and very crude storyboards. Plus: spoof junket interview; four-minute short; trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**



"I reckon we can make half a pound of meth a day."

## THE INVISIBLE MAN

Now you see him...

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1975-1976 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Creator Harve Bennett

▶ Cast David McCallum, Melinda Fee, Craig Stevens

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** "Based on the novel by HG Wells", the end credits declare, but one suspects that Herbert would have been aghast at this Monday-night NBC show, which ran for a pilot and 12 regular episodes.

It has a promising pedigree: future *Star Trek* movies producer Harve Bennett devised it; *Hill Street Blues*' Steven Bochko has writer credits. Set in a world where self-closing fire doors and guard dogs are mystifyingly rare, it sees scientist Daniel Westin (David McCallum) becoming a secret-weapon agent after a teleportation experiment goes awry. Featuring all the floating cups and chair-seat butt impressions you'd expect, the

“One suspects that HG Wells would have been aghast”

risible setup sees Westin donning a lifelike face mask (well, lifelike once he's pulled it on...), faux-skin gloves and polo neck, then shedding them to nose around a casino offices, mobsters' HQ or spiritualist's house. Only Robin Askwith can have spent more screen time undoing his trousers. You can see the disrobes coming, as the picture quality drops when blue-screen is imminent.

Initially setting out its stall as a fantastical espionage drama about government-related cases, the concept's soon broadened out so Westin is helping the little guy too. "REVERSE IT?" must have been scrawled on the brainstorm pad: one episode sees Westin breaking into a prison; the daftest has him pulling a bank heist to return stolen money to the safe.

It's chuckle-inducing hokum, and McCallum and on-screen wife Melinda Fee have decent chemistry. Just try not to think about how often Westin is standing there with his invisible meat and two veg swinging free.

➔ **Extras** None. **Ian Berriman**

**i** There's an unfortunate error in the opening titles: the phrase "machine malfunction" is missing its second letter "n"...

## (ROUND UP)



Disney+ subscribers can now stream it; the rest of you can buy **LIGHTYEAR** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD/download). This *Toy Story* spin-off imagines the movie that made Andy fall for Buzz Lightyear. We said: "Neither vintage space opera nor vintage Pixar... Its numerous nods to other, better movies only serve to highlight the fact that it's a little dull." Bonus-wise, you get commentary by the writer, director and DoP, seven deleted scenes and three featurettes. Hammer fans may already own Icon's perfectly good 2013 Blu-ray of **THE MUMMY** (out now, Blu-ray).

**Second Sight's Limited Edition** makes fairly limited additions: commentary by academic Kelly Robinson, an appreciation by critic David Huckvale and a discussion of the score. It comes with a book of essays and four art cards. We said: "The plot is a mite confused, but Christopher Lee's ability to invest a walking corpse with both pathos and terrifying power is remarkable." Also reissued: 1974's

**FRANKENSTEIN AND THE MONSTER FROM HELL** (out now, Blu-ray), Hammer's final gothic horror. The bonus offer is expanded similarly here: critical commentary; appreciation; bit on the score; essay book; five art cards. We said: "With moments of pathos outnumbered by the grisly and gruesome, it's a long way from the 1957 entry which established the brand." Icon's 2014 Blu-ray was similar. Finally, the latest TV box sets include **OUTLANDER** Season Six (26 September, Blu-ray/DVD) and **PEACEMAKER** Season One (out now, Blu-ray/DVD).

ALAMY





## FAIRY TALE

Some scares over the rainbow



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

584 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Stephen King**

► Publisher **Hodder & Stoughton**

► **According to the introduction** to *Fairy Tale*, this book is an answer to a question Stephen King asked himself at the start of the pandemic: what could he write that would make him happy? Well, we're glad *he's* happy...

This is King's spin on Narnia/Wonderland-style fantasy, with a youngster from our world discovering a portal to a fantasy land. Of course, King has vaguely dabbled in this genre before in his epic *The Dark Tower* series, and it's impossible to read this latest book without wondering where it fits into the King multiverse. But *Fairy Tale* is a far more literal reinterpretation of down-the-rabbit-hole storytelling, even if it does take a third of the book before we find the rabbit hole.

Illinois teen Charlie Reade (Reade? Read? Geddit?) has lost his mother in a grisly accident, and nearly lost his father to the bottle. He seems a pretty average high school kid – though there's a dark backstory that King teases out as the novel progresses – but his life

changes when he saves the life of the curmudgeonly old recluse who lives in the crumbling Bates Motel of a house at the end of the street. With the old guy, Mr Bowditch, incapacitated in hospital, Charlie looks after his aged dog and the house, and soon discovers that Bowditch owns an awful lot of gold. Where does it come from? And what's that noise coming from the shed?

The answers to these questions eventually lead Charlie to a fantasy land, where he embarks on a quest to save the life of Mr Bowditch's dog, one which gets grimmer and more bloody as it progresses. He meets giants, eldritch monsters, a dead mermaid, a princess with no mouth and a population cursed with grey, melting skin.

There's a harrowing extended sequence that merges *Rita Hayworth And Shawshank Redemption* with *Battle Royale*, and an ancient evil that could threaten Charlie's home world too. All the while, Charlie keeps noticing just how many parallels there are between what's happening to him and the fantasy stories he knows so well – though his Toto is a German Shepherd rather than a Cairn Terrier. All of which sounds great fun, but

actually becomes a bit of a slog when the fantasy quest takes over. Perversely, while the book takes seemingly ages to get to heading down the rabbit hole, it's the earlier stages, set in the real world, that contain the real King magic. The growing relationship between Charlie and old Bowditch and Radar, the dog, is full of charm, with some great character-building work, wry wit and lip-trembling moments.

The fantasy sections, meanwhile, feel laboured and oddly flat, and the plot becomes ploddingly linear (though, hey, it's a quest). Despite some effective horror moments, this fantasy world never truly comes to life. Characters that could and should have a Gaiman- or Gilliam-esque quirkiness are pedestrian.

The book is also frustratingly vague about its intentions. There's never an explicit suggestion that, say, the fairy tales of our world originated in this fantasy land or

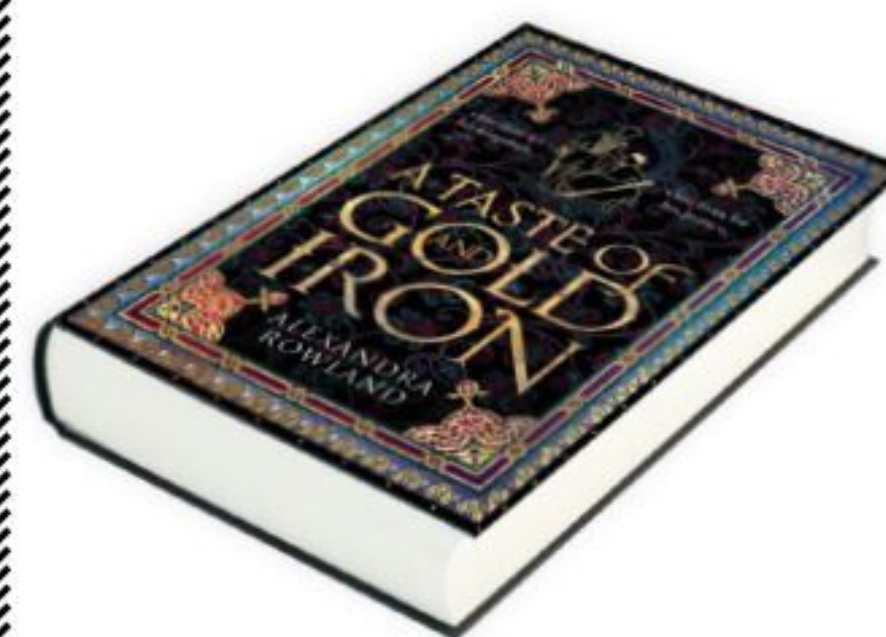
“It's the earlier stages that contain the real King magic”

that Charlie's exposure to fantasy literature and films is somehow creating it (both of which are well-worn clichés, anyway). Instead the message seems to be that anyone dropped into a fantasy world would start seeing parallels with the fantasy stories they've grown up with, perhaps because they're all crafted from a small pool of archetypes.

Which is a fair point, but is it worth writing a protracted novel about? If there is anything deeper going on here, the book isn't intriguing enough to encourage you to dig for it, and so Charlie's constant meandering speculation about his plight feels suspiciously like King giving himself an expositional get-out-of-jail card.

So, kudos to King for trying something a little different. You just wish he could have tried harder. **Dave Golder**

**i** The book references many literary fantasies, but not *The Dark Tower*. One character has read *Cujo*, though.



## A TASTE OF GOLD AND IRON



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

472 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Alexandra Rowland**

► Publisher **Tor**

► **At the heart of this**

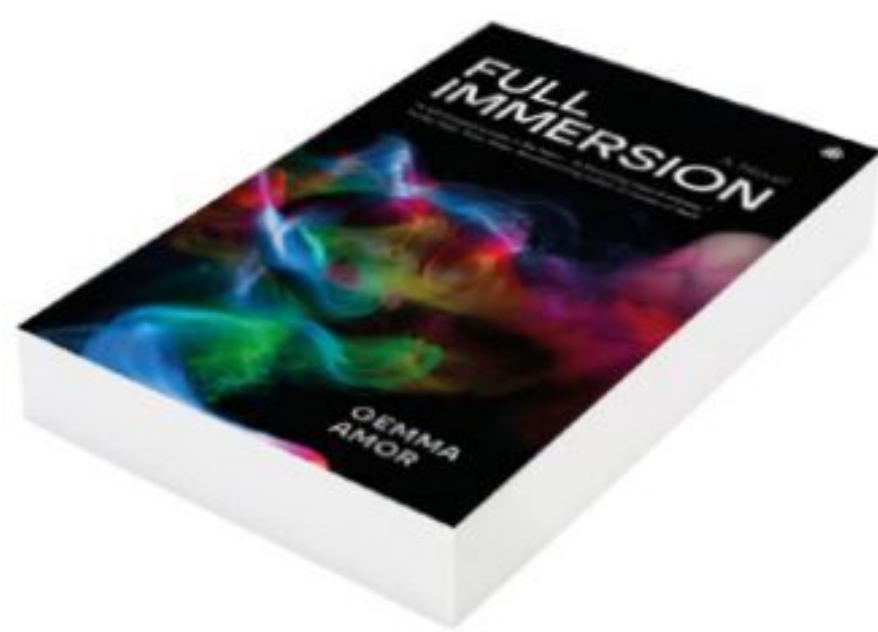
fantasy-romance is a love story; while there's a carefully drawn world and a tale of political intrigue to lead you on, those are probably not why you'll keep reading.

The principal setting is Kasaba, capital city of the Araști Empire, a mercantile nation whose power stems from trade and the trustworthiness of its currency. Some of its people have the ability to “taste” the content of metal objects. Prince Kadou, metal-tasting younger brother to the female Sultan, is an unusual lead, mainly because it's clear from fairly early on that he has panic attacks, though neither he nor the people around him identify them as such.

While he's investigating a counterfeiting plot that could, ultimately, undermine his nation's place in the world, his relationships with the people around him, from his sister to his various guards, are more important to the story.

There are no surprises here – you'll have a good idea who's doing the counterfeiting from early on, and you'll have no doubt that the Prince's handsome, stoic guard is falling for him – but the romance is charmingly done and not rushed, the passion is mutual, and watching it unfold as the counterfeiter is uncovered is heartwarming. **Miriam McDonald**





## FULL IMMERSION

★★★★★

► RELEASED 13 SEPTEMBER

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

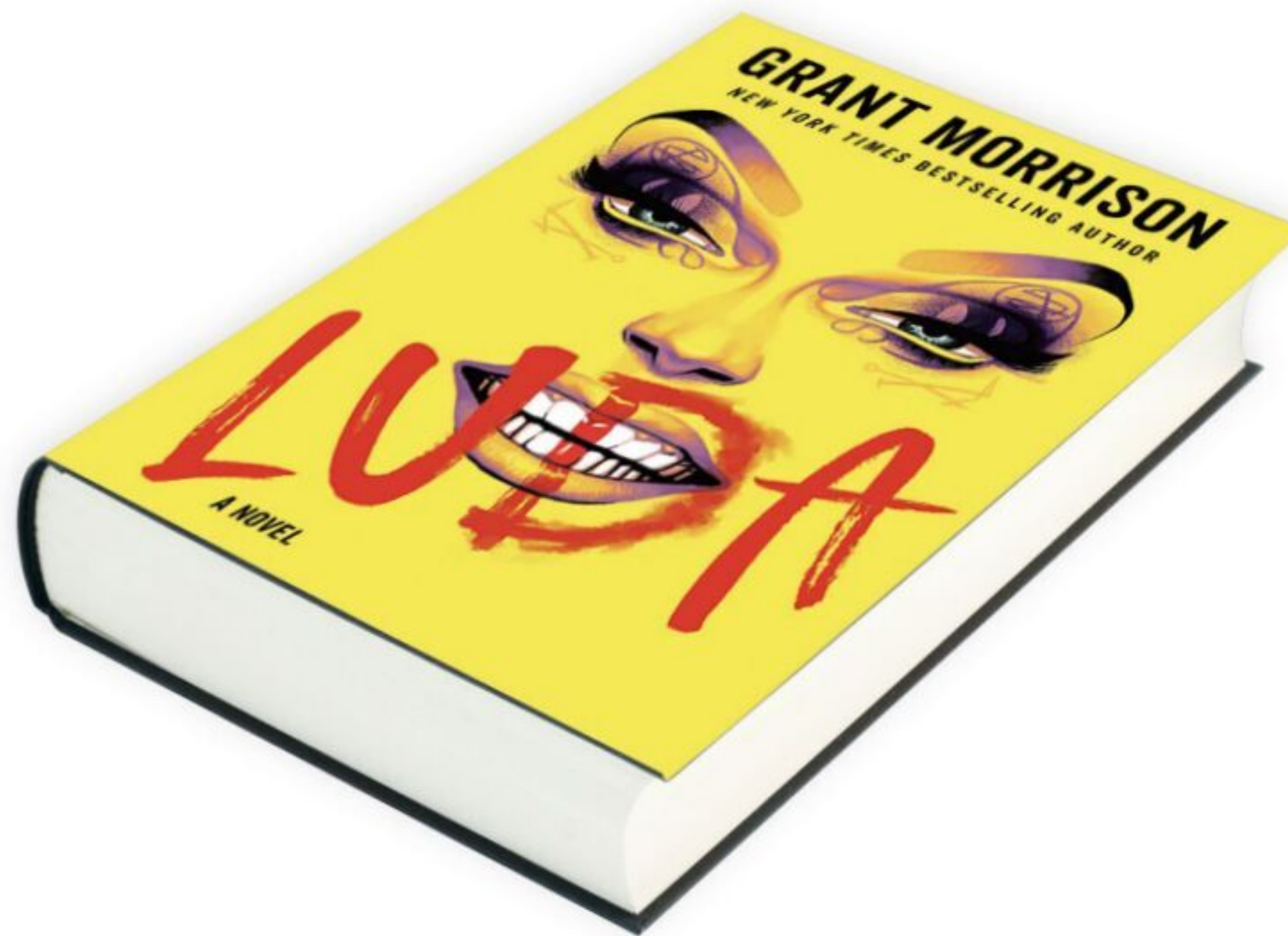
► Author Gemma Amor

► Publisher Angry Robot

➤ **Plenty of SF, fantasy and horror** has taken mental illness as a theme – but often this is merely implied (the delusional protagonist who doesn't realise they're delusional), or set in a heightened past (the many, many narratives set in Victorian asylums), or a metaphor. This book deals with it head-on, asking how technology might be used to treat mental illness.

It's a kind of bizarre detective novel, as the amnesiac protagonist finds her own body washed up near Bristol's Clifton Suspension Bridge. Instead of finding the murderer, she needs to understand why she keeps attempting suicide: this is an experimental form of therapy, placing her in a highly advanced virtual reality simulation which confronts her with a scenario where her attempts have succeeded, and invites her to explore her memories. But while in the simulation she finds herself stalked by a mysterious predator known as Silhouette.

Gemma Amor has taken on a considerable challenge here, honestly depicting the process of recovering from severe depression but also balancing this with the needs of an SF/horror story – and she's succeeded. The subject matter inevitably means that *Full Immersion* isn't always an easy read, but its prose is very readable and its despairing heroine is, despite her determination to push everyone away, still someone you can spend time with. **Eddie Robson**



## LUDA

Life's a drag

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

448 pages | Hardback

► Author Grant Morrison

► Publisher Del Rey Books

➤ **The world of performance and theatre**, Dahling, is a collegiate place, where the show must go on; pulling together is always the order of the day. But it's also, as comics maestro Grant Morrison knows from their own days as a performer, a place of competition and backbiting, where the rise of a newcomer is often at the expense of a fading star.

*Luda's* narrator Luci LaBang is on the wane, a drag queen who's made the journey from hot young thing to pantomime dame "in the blink of a mascara-clotted false eyelash". Luda, however, applying slap and coming in off the street to become principal boy to Luci's Widow Twankey, is on a very different trajectory.

Will the two work together or will they clash? Well, in a novel that plays with panto conventions (oh no, it doesn't, etc) throughout, of course they clash. And, this being the work of Grant Morrison, there's a strong supernatural element to the clash, in which the power of *The Glamour* ("The face I put on is more real than the one I conceal") drives the plot.

Not that there's always *quite enough* plot. Perhaps because they're taking the space to stretch out in what is (astonishingly) a debut novel, there's a strong sense that one of Morrison's main interests is in exploring Luci's voice. As a result, it helps to like Luci to enjoy *Luda* – especially in the early parts, where she first shows us the world of the Vallhambra Theatre in downtown Gasglow (yes, *Gasglow*), painting in her own backstory too.

“A novel that plays with panto conventions throughout”

If you do like Luci, in all her unreliable and catty glory, the pay-off is a novel that, via witchcraft, the rich tradition of British mysticism and *The Phantom Of The Opera* as well as panto, turns out to be a flamboyant exploration of how, especially in the age of social media, we all curate images of ourselves – images that are as much about ambition and aspiration as truth.

Jonathan Wright

**i** When Morrison received an MBE in 2012, Prince Charles told them "he used to like reading *Eagle* in the 1950s".



## THE CHILDREN OF GODS AND FIGHTING MEN

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

440 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Shauna Lawless

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

➤ **Shauna Lawless blends** fantasy with historical fiction to great effect in her debut novel. In 10th century Ireland, Gormflaith and her brother Máelmórda are the last of the Fomorians, immortals who can wield fire magic. With the siblings' kind hunted to the brink of extinction by their eternal enemies, the Descendants of the Tuatha Dé Danann, Gormflaith hides her abilities but hungers for power, scheming to put her mortal son Sitric on the throne of Dublin.

Fódla is a healer from the Descendants assigned to spy on Brian Boru, King Of Munster, whose rapid rise threatens to bring war to Ireland. Suspicious of the mortals' bloodthirsty ways, Fódla befriends Boru's son Murchad, bringing her closer to the Munster King. The contrast between Gormflaith's ruthlessness and Fódla's gentleness brings variety and depth to the storytelling, while the fact that the women must navigate a world of feuding men adds to a sense of danger.

The warring kingdoms premise invites comparisons to *Games Of Thrones*, but Lawless has her own voice and the Irish setting lends the book a distinct flavour. Inevitably for the start of a series, major plot threads remain unresolved, but with its vibrant characters and skilful storytelling, this one is off to an impressive start. **David West**



## ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY

Extra, extra, read all about it



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

240 pages | Hardback

► Author Caseen Gaines

► Publisher Titan Books

➤ **Just in time for its 40th anniversary**, Steven Spielberg's lost-alien classic gets the deluxe Making Of treatment. It's a comprehensive, satisfying journey down memory lane, which

skilfully weaves together concept art, archive photos and contributions from most of the major players.

The book follows the movie's evolution from an alien visitation horror to the more child-friendly smash hit it became. Although Hollywood was slow to spot the potential in Melissa Mathison's script, it was always ideal territory for Spielberg, whether he was

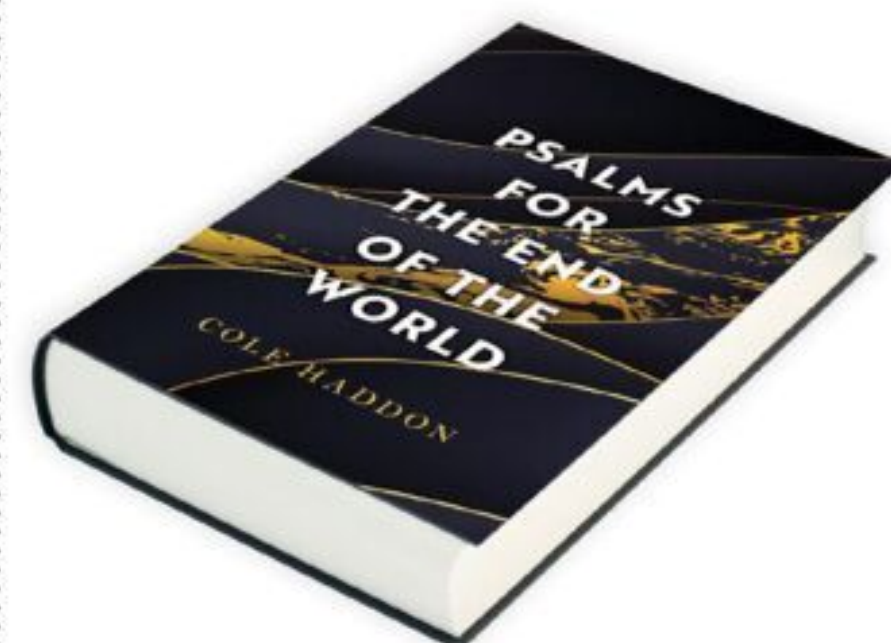
directing child actors or a puppet star who – thanks to Carlo Rambaldi's innovative prosthetics – was considerably easier to work with than Bruce, the shark in *Jaws*.

Taking detours to reveal the mime artist who became pivotal to ET's performance or ILM's epic mission to capture *that* shot of the Moon, the book feels close to exhaustive. It also addresses the infamous spin-off videogame that almost killed Atari, and Spielberg's controversial decision to replace government agents' guns with walkie-talkies in the 2002 Special Edition.

Really, the only flaw is that revisiting a production that avoided significant mishaps can sometimes feel a little, well, dull – admirable levels of professionalism aren't always conducive to great drama.

**Richard Edwards**

**i** While devising ET's look, they cut out photos, combining, say, Albert Einstein's eyes with the bottom half of a cat's face.



## PSALMS FOR THE END OF THE WORLD



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

528 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Cole Haddon

► Publisher Headline

➤ **The multiverse is big right now.** From second chances at love to the hope that there's a version of the world where Trump isn't a thing, the idea is a rich mine for storytelling, full of hope, bittersweet regret and endless possibility. In Cole Haddon's debut, you can even be your own love-triangle rival.

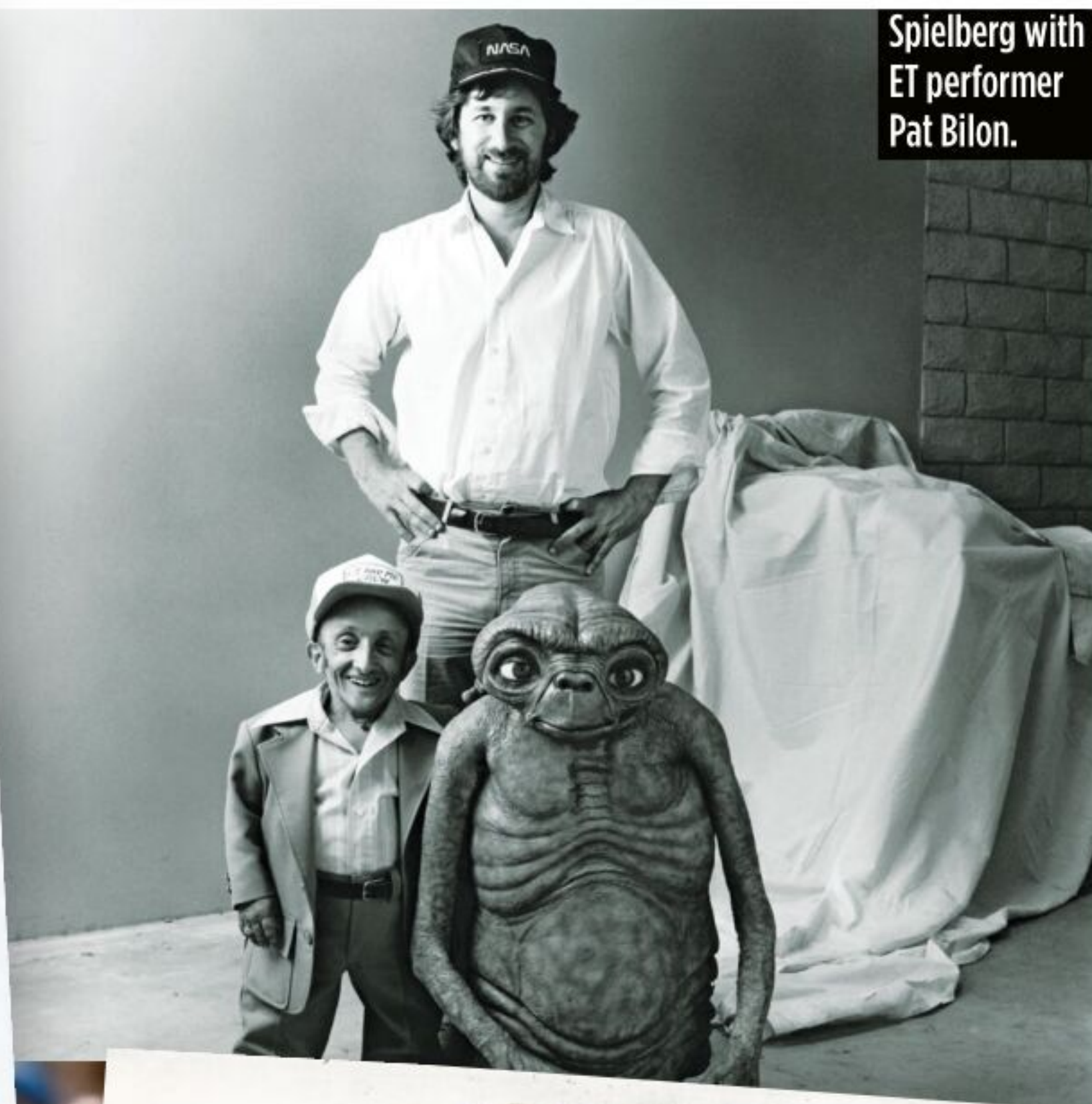
It's stuffed (perhaps a little too much so) with characters and settings, which we cut between with sometimes dizzying speed. In 1960s California, waitress and physics student Grace is enjoying a will-they-won't-they romance with a regular, until he turns up one day with no memory and a warrant for his arrest.

In 1780s France, a reclusive artist paints canvases that send people mad. There's also a Japanese astronaut in 2027, a Jewish Nazi-hunter, a would-be Hollywood screenwriter with memories of another world, a disaffected Somali teenager whose rabbit orders him to build bombs, a very Bowie-esque pop star, and more.

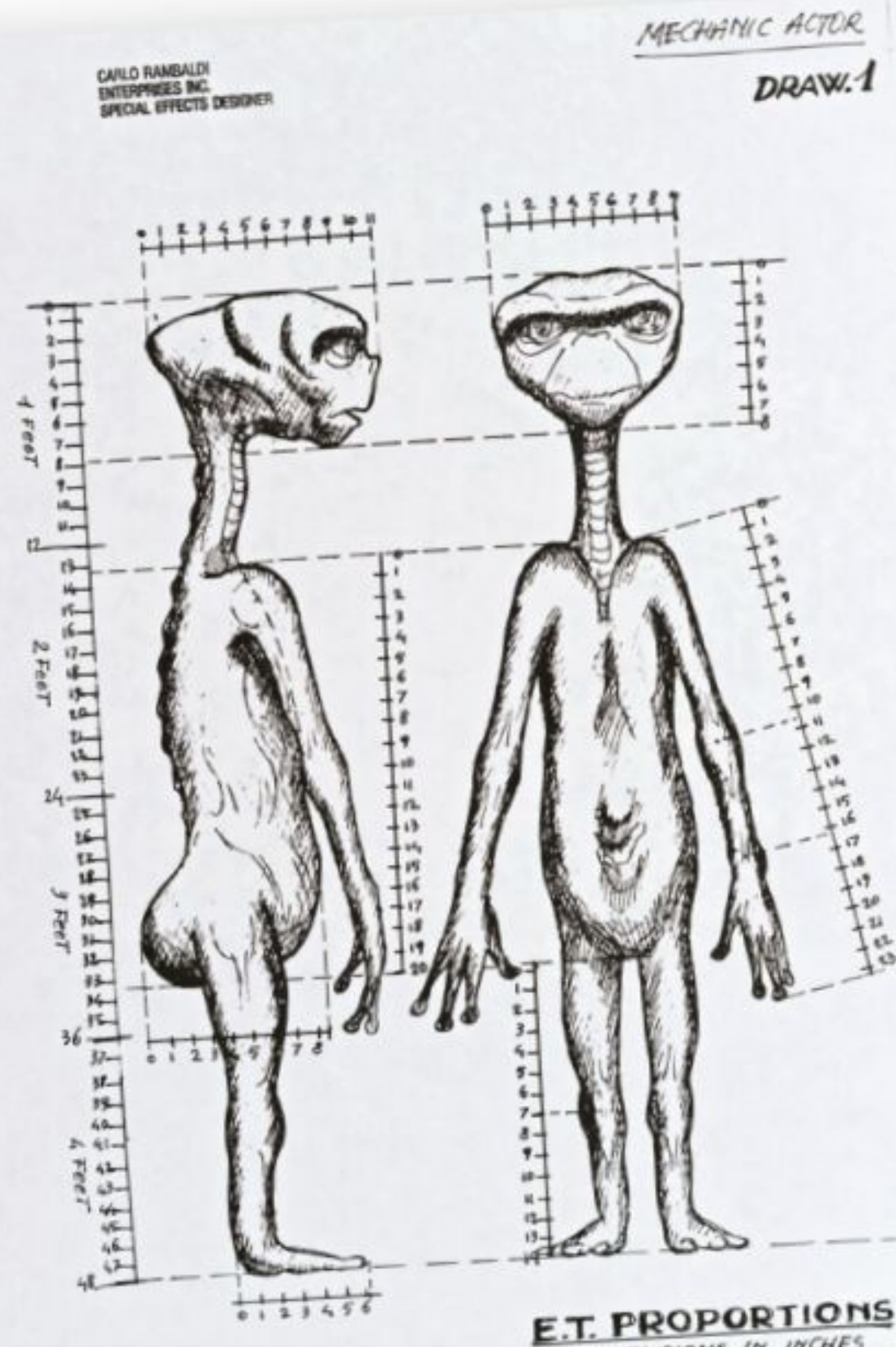
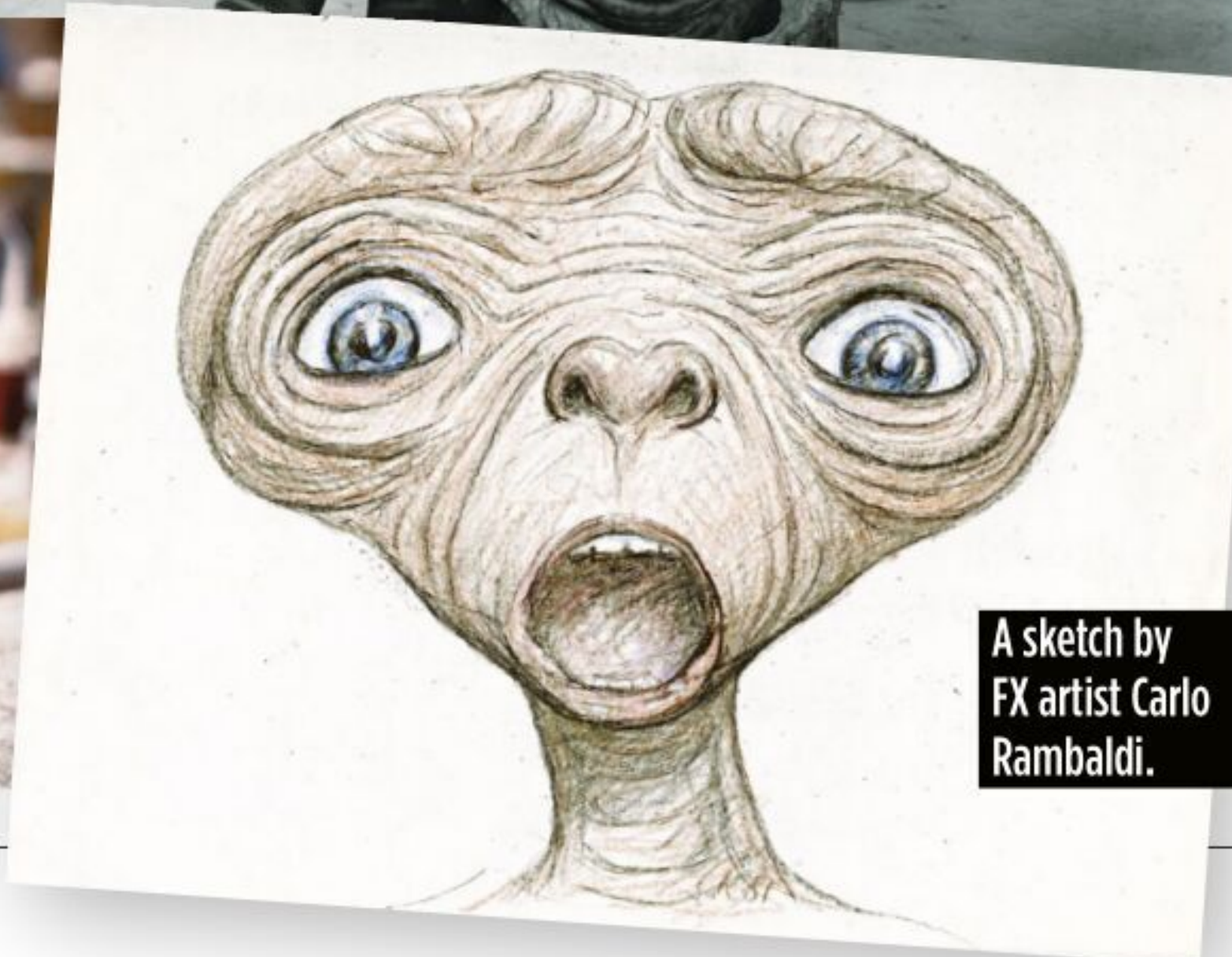
The obvious comparison is *Cloud Atlas*, and while it lacks that novel's panache (and skilful pastiche), there's still fun to be had in spotting connections across storylines,, and a pathos to the portrayal of failures and fresh starts. Over-long, but absorbing.

**Nic Clarke**

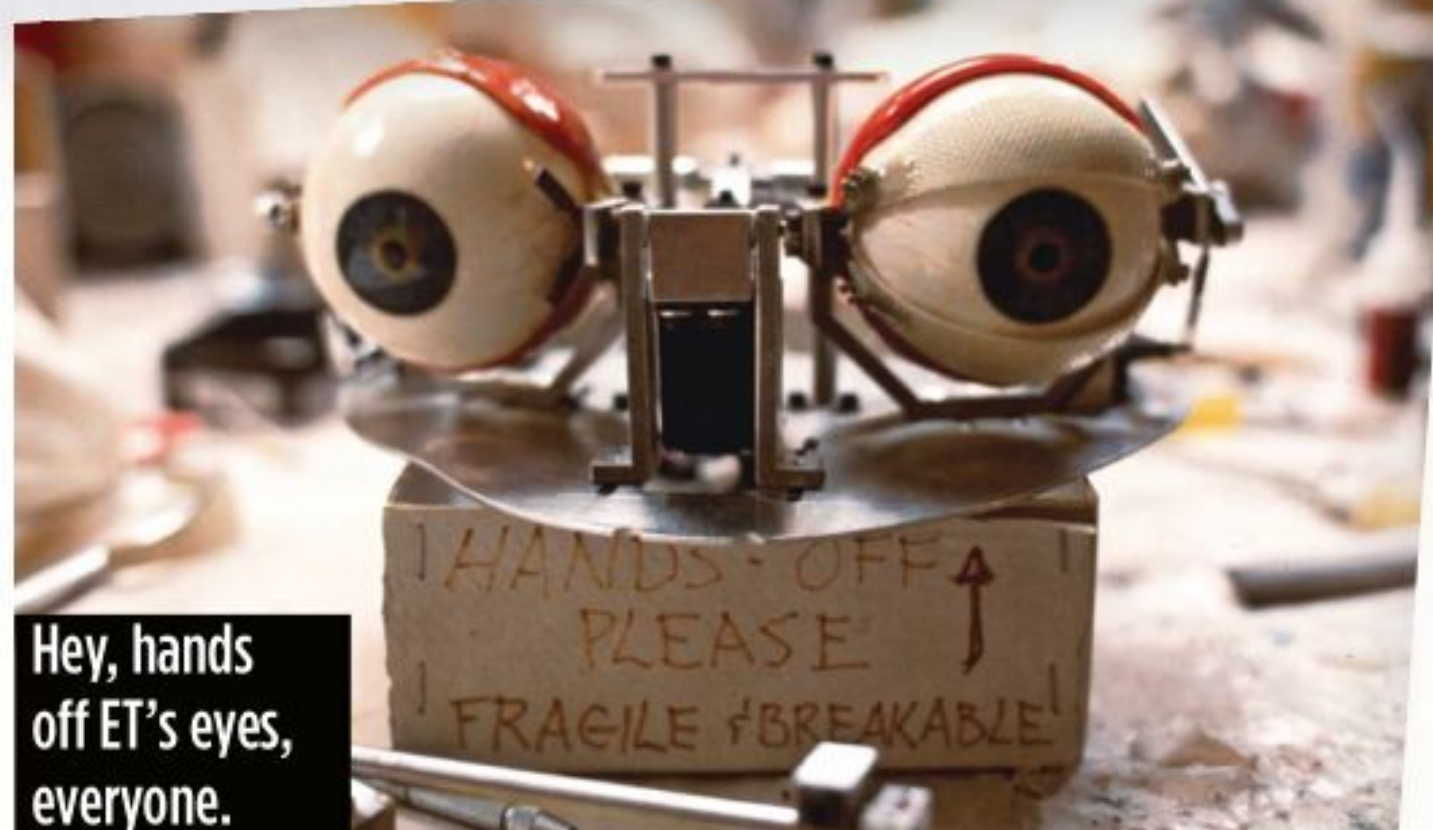
Spielberg with ET performer Pat Bilon.



A sketch by FX artist Carlo Rambaldi.



ET PROPORTIONS  
DIMENSIONS IN INCHES



Hey, hands off ET's eyes, everyone.





## THE LOST GIRL KING

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

308 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Catherine Doyle

► Publisher Bloomsbury

Children's Books

► Celtic myths have long been a source of inspiration for fiction, and the Irish land of Tír na nÓg has spawned everything from comic strips to computer games. In this children's novel, it's reached via an up-flowing waterfall, which brother and sister Liam and Amy wander through in search of adventure on their summer holidays.

Of course, magical lands are never what they're promised to be, and soon Liam has been kidnapped by the Dullahan, whose leader, Tarlock, needs a human child in order to continue his reign over Tír na nÓg. Amy joins with a group of warriors to try and rescue Liam and end Tarlock's devastating rule, while Liam attempts to survive imprisonment and find friends amongst his captors.

It's a straightforward quest tale, whose heart is firmly in the right place. Unfortunately, even for a children's book it all feels a little too easy for Amy, as she smart-talks back to warrior chiefs and persuades leaders to stand and fight with plucky speeches and a brave heart. Things are always just a little too neat – not least the ending, which favours happy resolution over any exploration of grief or consequences. Younger children will probably enjoy having it read to them, but it feels a little too simplistic for anyone old enough to make it through 300 pages on their own. **Rhian Drinkwater**



## UNRAVELLER

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

496 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Frances Hardinge

► Publisher Macmillan

Children's Books

► Curses grow like wild flowers in this beautifully written fantasy novel about a land blighted by vengeance. This is a world where magic is common; where people can hurl curses like weapons and condemn their victims to a life of misery as either an object or an animal.

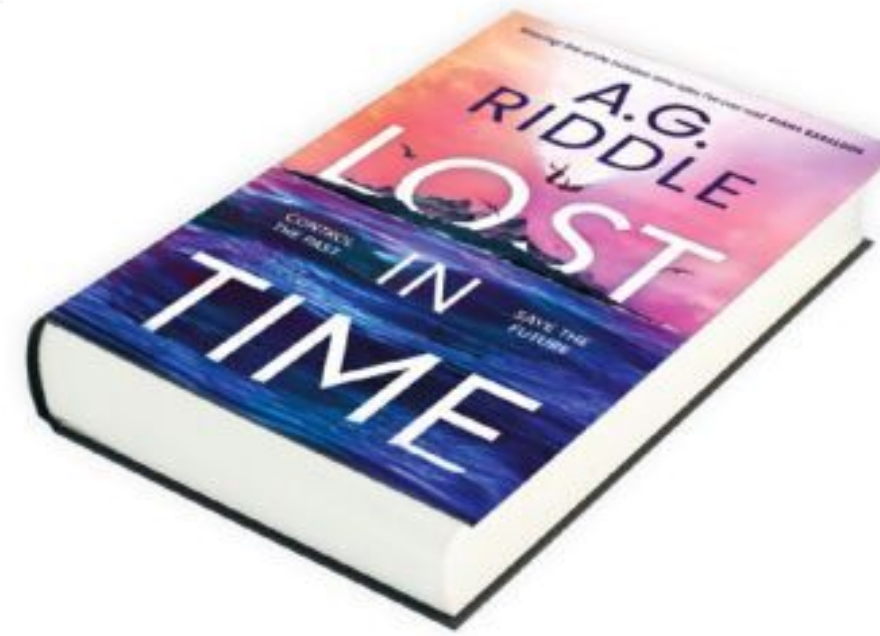
In the centre of this tangled web is Kellan, a troubled boy with the gift to undo, or "unravel", such curses, and his companion Nettle, a girl who spent years as a bird because of her cruel stepmother.

It's a gripping read, if a little rambling. In a fantasy world where curses fester in the hearts of downtrodden people, the two companions must search for the criminal who has woven their own curse for Kellan – a search which takes them through wild marshlands, blood-red hospitals and forests full of moonlit spiders. It's a treat, especially for younger readers drawn to richly conjured landscapes.

Yet the real treasure is the bond between the two teens. Kellan is loud and rash whereas Nettle is quiet and contemplative, but they're both misfits cut from the same cloth: outcasts from their homelands, neither of them belong.

For anyone who's ever struggled to fit in – so most of us – discovering them heal and find a home in one another is genuinely touching.

**Kimberley Ballard**



## LOST IN TIME

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

464 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author AG Riddle

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

► When we say that *Lost In Time* posits the bootstrap paradox as the universe having an existential crisis, you'll probably assume the book is going to be heavy going. Wrong. Very wrong. It's an utterly ludicrous, twisty-turny time travel caper, with a plot that could happily make a *Bill & Ted* sequel, although written absolutely straight. And it almost pulls it off.

It's set in a near future where crime has plummeted thanks to a new cruel and unusual punishment: Absolom is a one-way-ticket time machine that send criminals into an unknown past in a parallel universe. Completely ignoring what Amnesty might have to say about this, the book quickly gets into exploring this concept when one of Absolom's creators is convicted of murdering another of its creators. When he's sent to the past, his daughter must work out which of his colleagues is the real murderer. That's when things become really complicated...

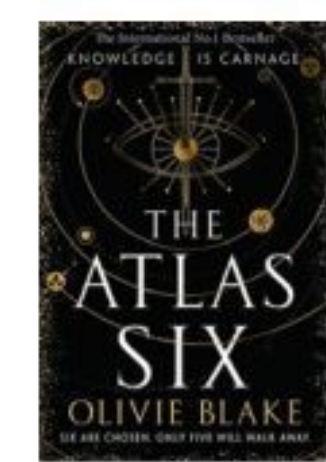
In terms of time-travel shenanigans it's in Steven Moffat territory, though with a few brief attempts to examine the philosophy of time travel. But mainly, it's just a very silly, plot-driven page-turner which hopes that you don't notice the massive lapses in logic, plot holes and suspect, pseudo-science exposition. Or that it basically ends up as *Quantum Leap*.

**Dave Golder**

## REISSUES

Olivie Blake's **THE ATLAS SIX** (★★★★★,

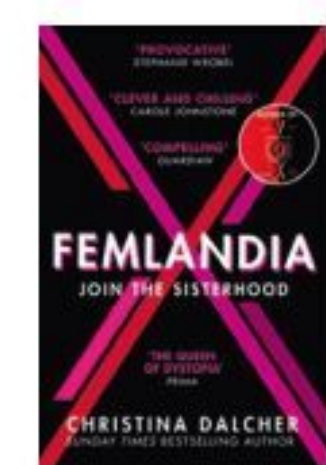
15 September, Tor) was initially a self-published TikTok hit; now an Amazon TV show is in the works. It centres on a year-long contest between six magicians. The prize: admission to the Alexandrian Society,



guardians of a library of arcane knowledge. The snag: with five places up for grabs, one of them will

not survive... We said: "Dense with ideas, with a compelling premise that forces the candidates to question the morality of their pursuit of knowledge... A richly satisfying head-trip." Economic collapse has brought America to its knees in Christina Dalcher's dystopian thriller

**FEMLANDIA** (★★★★★, 15 September, HQ). With the shops empty and the streets no longer safe,



Miranda takes her 16-year-old daughter to an off-grid all-female community founded by her mother...

but it's not the safe haven they were hoping for. We said: "Flawed, rounded characters and provocative exploration of ever-topical concepts make it a fascinating and engrossing read." Finally, MA Kuzniar's **MIDNIGHT IN EVERWOOD** (★★★★★, 29 September, HQ) is a fairy tale retelling of popular ballet *The Nutcracker*. Set in 1906 Nottingham, it centres on would-be ballerina



Marietta, who's imprisoned in a fantasy land by a sinister toymaker after rejecting his advances.

We said: "The story of Marietta dancing to save her life is one you'll feel invested in, and her growth as a person is nicely drawn."





## LEDGE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 13 SEPTEMBER**

340 pages | Hardback/ebook

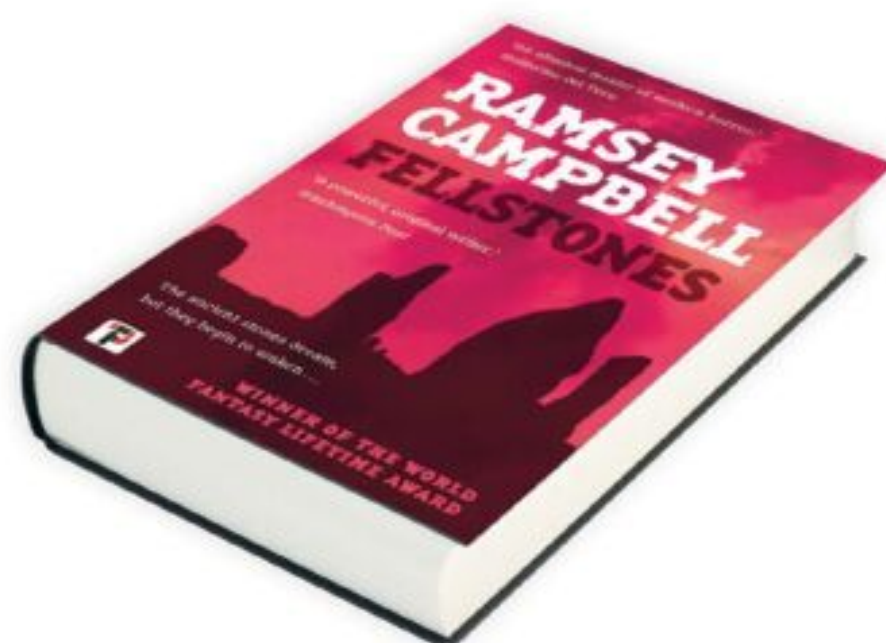
► Author Stacey McEwan

► Publisher Angry Robot Books

➤ **Ledge will succeed no** matter what critics say – author Stacey McEwan is a TikTok star with enough fans to fill Wembley Stadium three times over. The novel was penned with their encouragement, and was set to be a self-publishing phenomenon – followers' pre-orders alone certified it an Amazon bestseller in days – before Angry Robot swooped on the mainstream release rights. Fortunately for everybody, it is actually good.

The story of human Dawsyn and half-Glacian Ryon is as much romance as it is swords-and-sorcery fantasy. Their will-they-won't-they (they do) tale dominates every page. A cold war between the humans of the valley and the winged Glacians of the mountains is about to thaw into battle, with Dawsyn and Ryon taking a break from shagging to lead the revolution.

The rivals-to-lovers attraction, the trembling breath, the surrendering to lust... The *Bridgerton* crowd will love it. But so too will the *Buffy* crowd. With its ice-bound society, determined female lead and political plot twists, *Ledge* calls to mind Mark Lawrence's recent release *The Girl And The Stars*. The heroes are compelling, rugged but likeable, and there's a confident immediacy to the present-tense prose. Overcoming a slightly saggy middle, the novel drops a cliffhanger in the last few pages, meaning the sequel has a lot to deliver. **Dave Bradley**



## FELLSTONES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 13 SEPTEMBER**

256 pages | Hardback/paperback/ebook

► Author Ramsey Campbell

► Publisher Flame Tree Press

➤ **Genre legend Ramsey** Campbell's latest flirts with folk horror clichés, but finds its real chills in oppressive family dynamics. Michael has spent his adulthood trying to avoid the Stavelys – the couple that took him in after his biological parents' deaths. Now going under the name Paul Dunstan, he's established a new life for himself with partner Caren and a career as a musician.

Then Adele Stavely, the sister he grew up with, tracks him down and pulls him back to the archetypally creepy village of Fellstones, with its looming neolithic stones. There's a festival happening soon and the locals are very keen that he take part...

Right from the off you can see why Paul wanted out – the Stavelys are absolutely *awful*, clinging to him like limpets while also undermining the choices he's made away from the village. The first half of the book, especially, lingers in a constant state of claustrophobic familial unease that's both rage-inducing and, after a while, really quite exhausting.

Fans of *Children Of The Stones* will find themselves nodding in recognition at a couple of moments, but for the most part Campbell avoids leaning too hard on the tropes. Instead, this strange, uneasy, at times frustrating novel leans into the areas where the psychological and the supernatural overlap.

**Will Salmon**



## MONSTERS BORN AND MADE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Tanvi Berwah

► Publisher Sourcebooks Fire

➤ **This YA debut from a South** Asian author breathes new life into old tropes of plucky teens fighting an unfair system.

The system itself is modelled on real-world caste hierarchies, with protagonist Koral and her family caught between the elite Landers and the low-caste Renters. Landers see them as filthy Renters, but their work with the Landers catching sea monsters – maristags – for them to race sees them despised by their own people, especially the revolutionary Freedom's Ark group.

With an ill sister and no money for medicine, Koral decides the only way to save her family is to enter the Glory Race, a tournament usually only competed in by Landers. If she wins, the prize money will ensure a life of ease – but with everyone rooting against her, is that possible?

It's a work that's full of great ideas that unfortunately never quite gels. The intricate world is well-designed, especially the people's varying places within hierarchies, and the punishments for transgressing them. And the problematic aspects of the revolutionary Arkers make for a mature look at an often simplified issue.

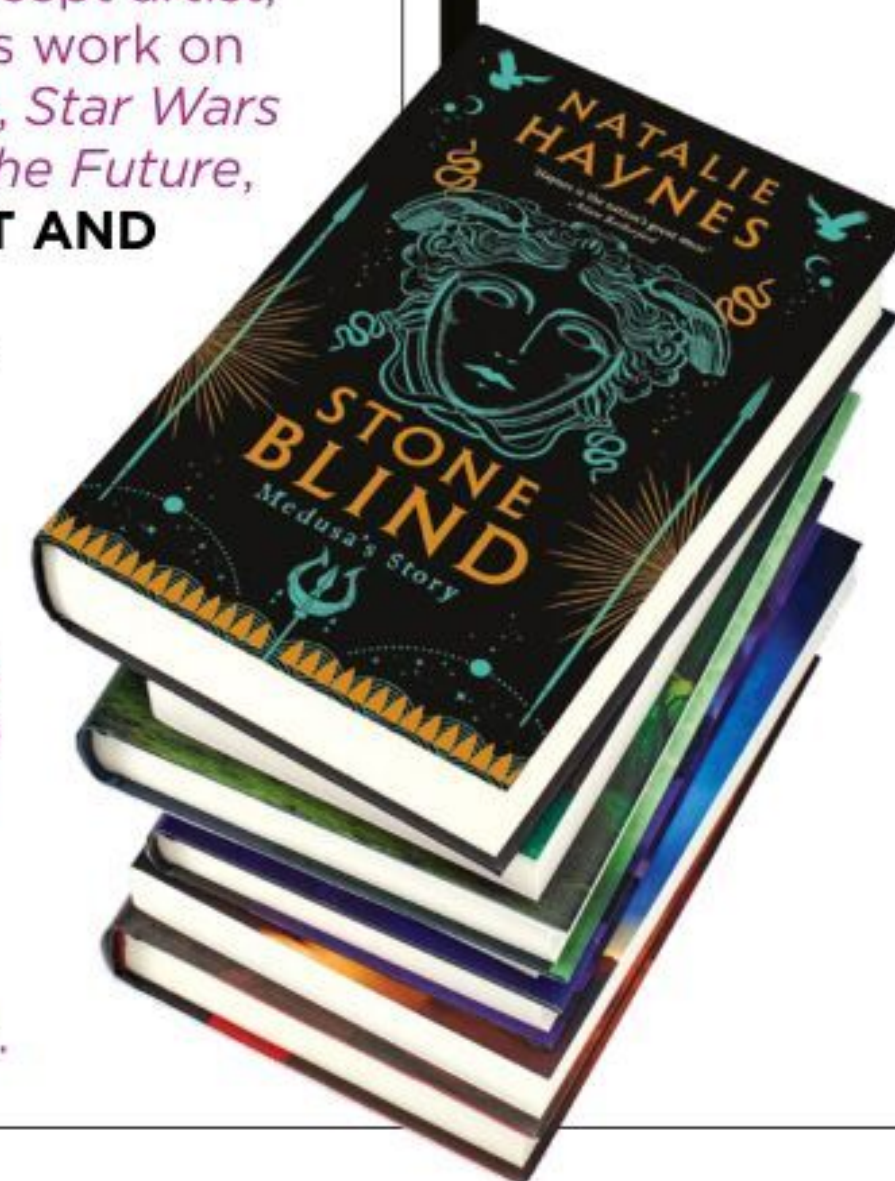
In contrast, Koral's plan for rescuing her family seems a childish dream with little substance. We're looking forward to Berwah's future work, though. **Rhian Drinkwater**

## ALSO OUT

There are plenty more books we couldn't fit in, starting with a pair of riffs on Greek mythology.

Claire North's **ITHACA** (8 September, Orbit) centres on Penelope, wife of Odysseus. Years after her husband sailed to war with Troy, speculation is mounting that he's dead, with suitors lining up; can she maintain the delicate balance of power?

Nathalie Haynes's **STONE BLIND** (15 September, Pan), meanwhile, reimagines the story of Medusa as "a meditation on mortality, betrayal and the cruel limits of beauty", telling the story of how a young woman became a monster. The *Fighting Fantasy* series celebrates its 40th anniversary with two new gamebooks by original creators Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone: **SECRETS OF SALAMONIS** and **SHADOW OF THE GIANTS** (out now, Scholastic). One sends you travelling to the titular city to make your fortune; the other has you searching for the man who can defeat Iron Giants unleashed by a magical artefact. Text stories from '60s British comic Valiant are collected in **THE ASTOUNDING JASON HYDE** (out now, Rebellion); thanks to exposure to radiation, its titular scientist has the power to see through solid objects and read thoughts. Turning to non-fiction: coffee table book **THE ART OF RON COBB** (13 September, Titan) pays tribute to the renowned concept artist, showcasing his work on films like *Alien*, *Star Wars* and *Back To The Future*, while **THE ART AND SCIENCE OF ARRIVAL** (out now, Titan) combines concept art, behind-the-scenes photos and interviews with the crew of Denis Villeneuve's 2016 first-contact movie.

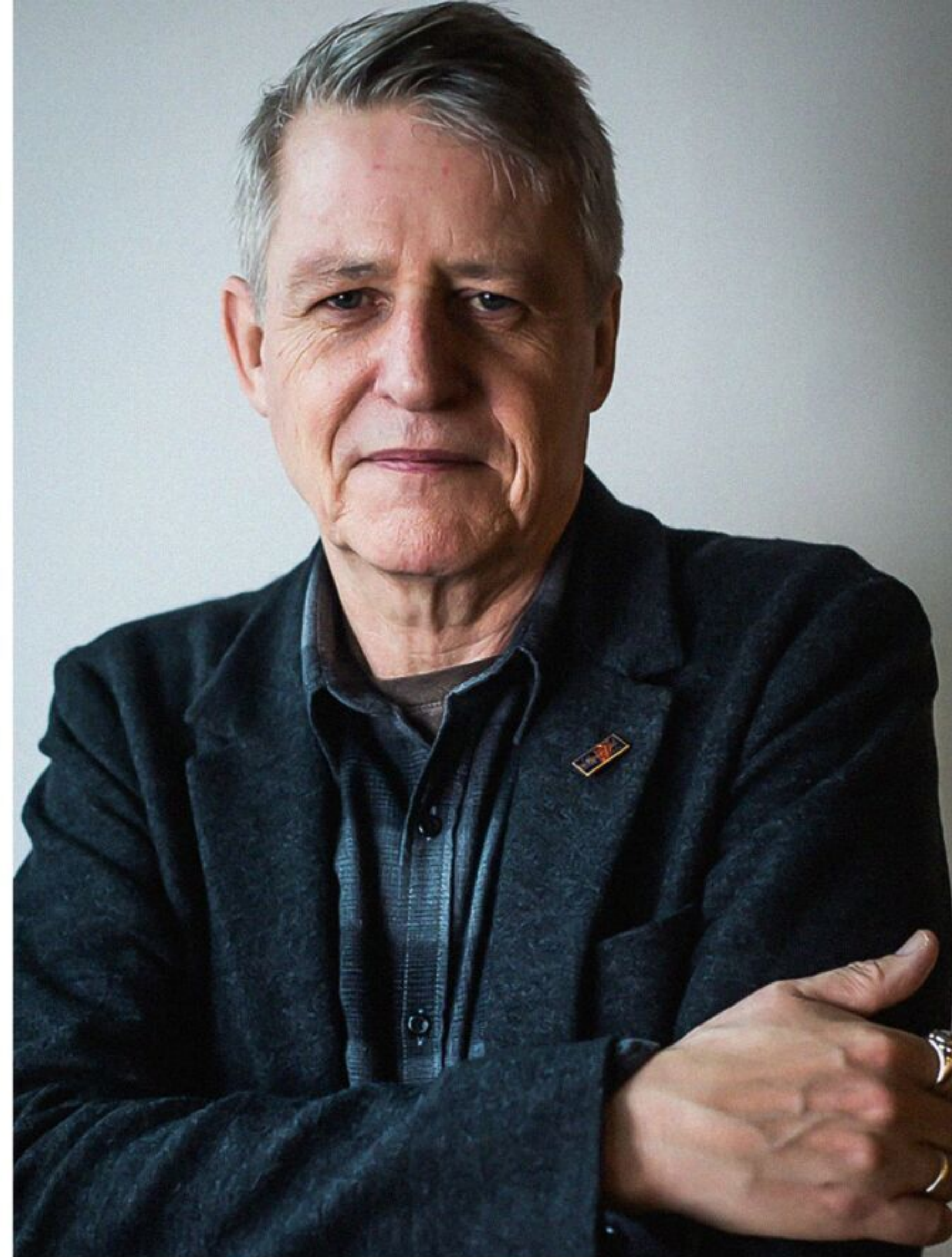






# Paul McAuley

The award-winning SF author was clearly a precocious child...



LAWRIE PHOTOGRAPHY

## What is your daily writing routine like?

► If I'm trying to start something, making a lot of notes as I try to find my way inside it. If working on a first draft, reading whatever I wrote yesterday before trying to add a little more. If revising, working until I lose focus.

## Describe the room in which you typically write.

► Long and narrow and dimly lit. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves at one end; more bookshelves at the other, an L-shaped desk on which a computer is positioned so I'm angled away from the nearest window. That's where I most often work, but I can write anywhere – a café, a train, a hotel room, a park... What is written is always more important than where or how.

## Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

► The one I was trying to write when undergoing some very thorough chemotherapy.

## Have you ever come up with a good plot idea in a dream?

► If I ever had some kind of revelation in a dream, in the way that August Kekule discovered the ring structure of benzene, it dissolved on waking. And besides, my dreams follow their own logic,

which is not the logic of the waking world. I find getting out of the house and going for a walk is the best way to work out narrative options and untie seemingly intractable knots.

## Were you a keen reader as a child? Which books were your favourites?

► Very much so. I read myself out of the children's section of my local library and was granted a ticket for the adult section at a stupidly precocious age. After devouring most of the science fiction books, I began a random journey through all the other

“I can write anywhere – a café, a train, a hotel room...”

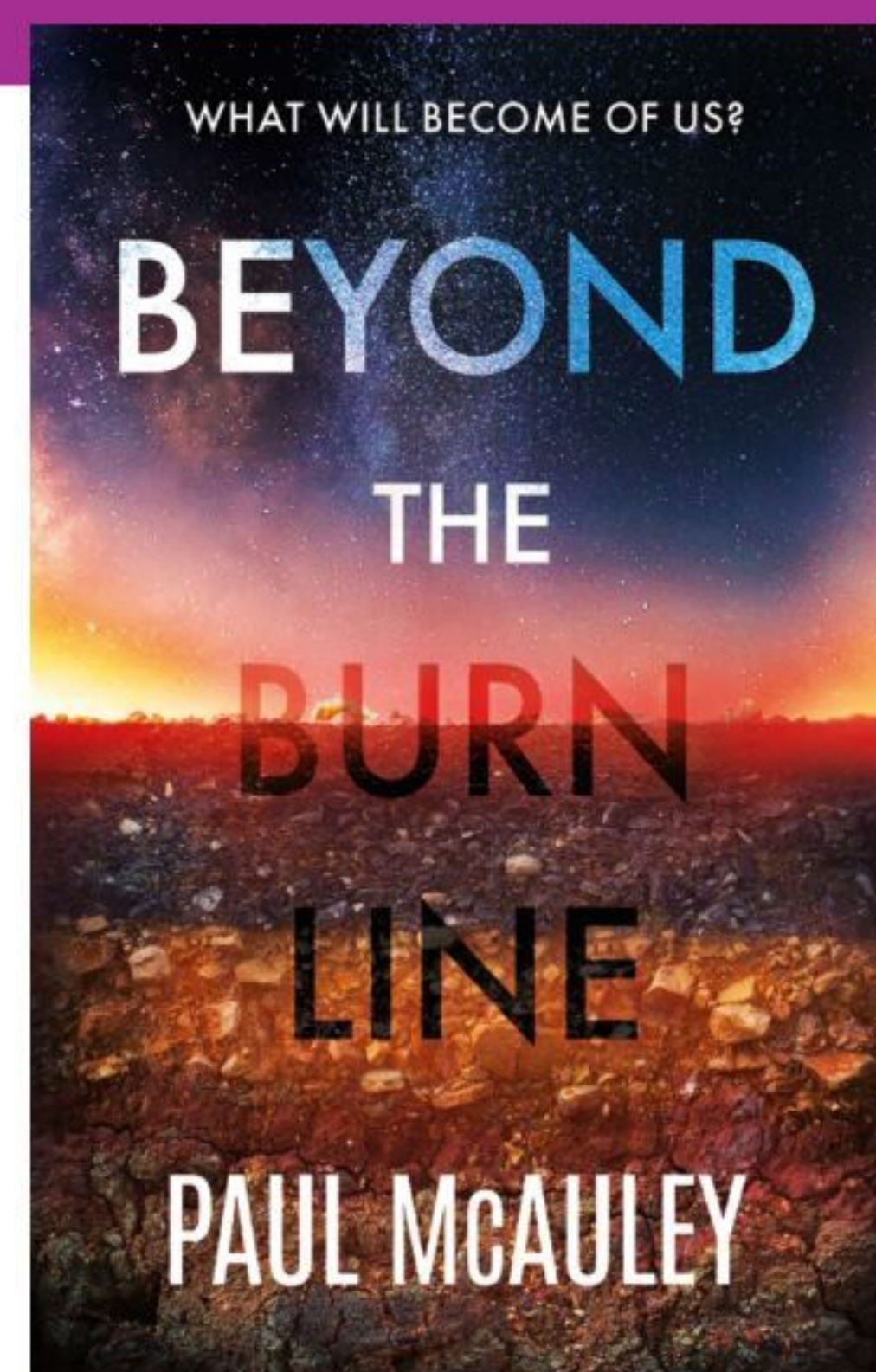
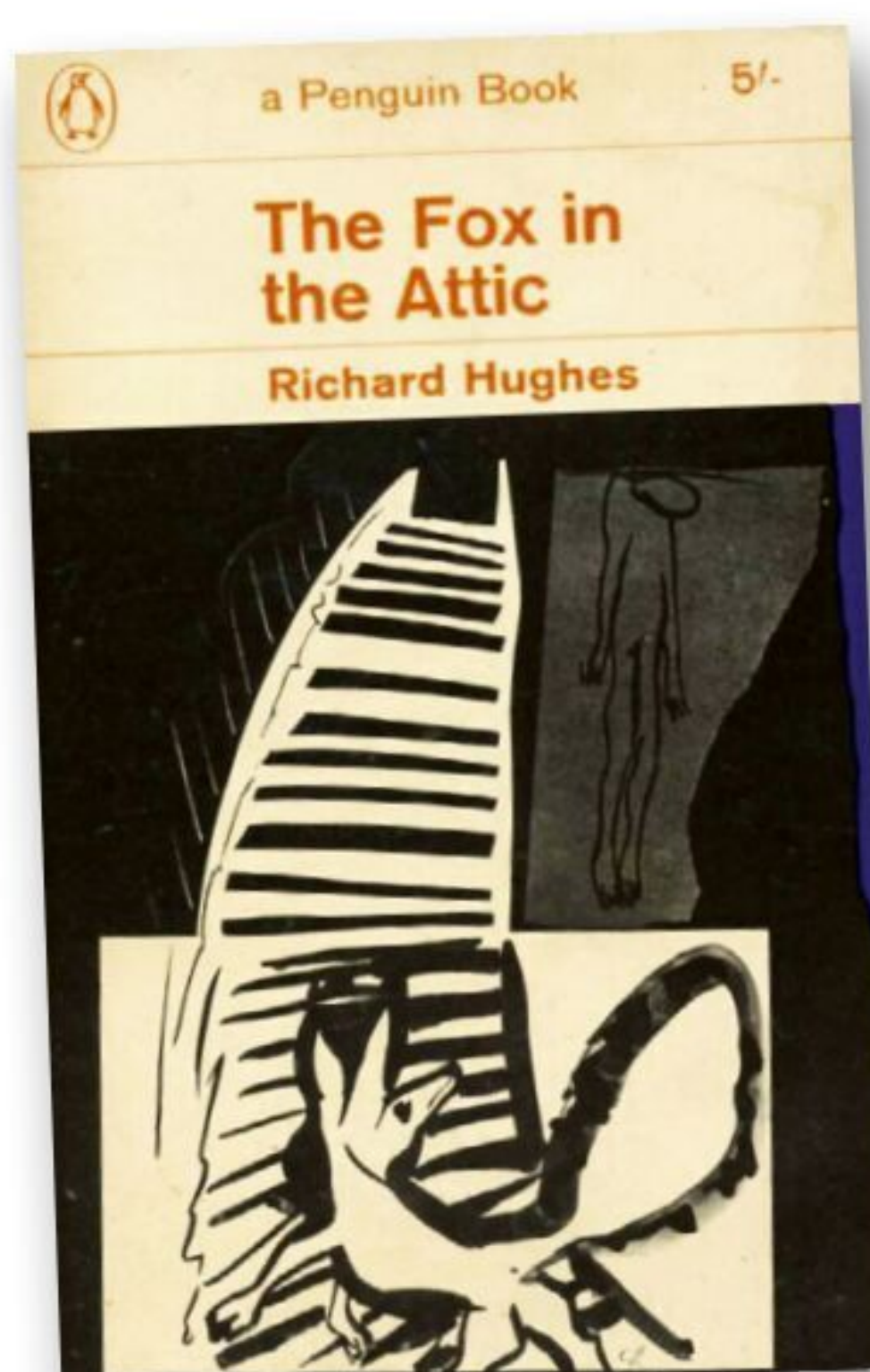
fiction shelves – but by then I was a teenager. Childhood favourites? Anthony Buckridge's *Jennings* books, Richmal Crompton's *Just William* stories, Jules Verne and HG Wells, Mary Renault (I had a thing for Greek myths), and random finds in jumble sales, including an Ace edition of Keith Roberts's *Pavane* which I still have. Also the backs and sides of cereal packets, if nothing else was to hand.

## What would be your desert island book?

► TH White's *The Once And Future King*.

## If you could recommend one book that you love, but that's not very well known, what would it be?

► Richard Hughes's *The Fox In The Attic*, first volume of the Human Predicament trilogy. A rich, strange novel with an unforgettable opening in which two men carry the body of a drowned child across a salt marsh towards a mansion as hauntingly decrepit as Castle Gormenghast,



and intertwined narratives of unrequited love and Germany's plunge into Nazism. Hughes published the trilogy's second novel *The Wooden Shepherdess* 12 years later, but died before completing the third. Both titles are out of print in the UK.

## Where's the oddest place you've seen one of your books?

► Bermuda.

## What's the best piece of writing advice you've either received or read?

► Don't look back.

*Beyond The Burn Line* is out on 22 September, published by Gollancz.



# First Read

AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

# The Children Of Gods And Fighting Men

by Shauna Lawless

A GRIPPING NEW HISTORICAL FANTASY THAT INTERTWINES  
IRISH MYTHOLOGY WITH REAL-LIFE HISTORY

**992 AD. Gormflaith, widowed queen of Dublin (and secretly one of the magical race of Fomorians), takes drastic action to secure her ambitions for her son – and herself.**

It was cold inside my squalid little house. I closed the door tight and wrapped myself up in my furs – the ones that Glunairn's wife hadn't stolen before I returned from Iona – and held my hand over the kindling sitting in the firepit. A flame ran down my fingers and the kindling burst into flames. I didn't need to light it for I never felt the cold. Mother told me it was our Fomorian blood that kept us warm. The rain and wind irked me as it did the mortals, but I did not shiver and wilt like them when the winter air blew in. Fire, though, oh, I loved the feeling of flames close to my skin. Smiling, I lay on the bed and lit a candle.

I should have been tired, and yet now a fire was dancing beside me, I felt more awake than ever. I watched it move, mesmerised by the shapes made by the flames and smoke, and let half the candle burn before I stood and opened the door.

The noise from the great hall had vanished, though the shouts of the men by the firepits now replaced it. I heard Sitric's voice often. Someone had started a wrestling competition. These were always popular, and from the sounds of it, a great deal of gold was being wagered on the outcome.

**“The dying firepit suddenly burned hot, and a fire-bolt shot out from the coals to collide with his face”**

Tiptoeing out of my front door, I wrapped a scarf over my face and stared at the great hall. The doors were open, and it appeared empty, aside from the outline of Egil still slumped over the table. I weaved my way past the houses built around it, using them to shield me from the eyes of the men by the firepits. When the next fight finished, they erupted into cheers, and I ran from the shadows, up the steps and through the open doors.

The fire in the centre of the hall was almost out, and the only light came from the torches attached to the wall. As expected, the room was empty, save for Egil who snored into the wooden table. Deciding it would be best that no one saw me helping him to my house, I closed the doors. I didn't want another to offer him a bed in their house. That wouldn't do at all.

“Ah, Gormflaith,” a deep voice murmured. “I was wondering if you would show up.”

I glanced at the far end of the room to find Glunairn walking out of the passageway that led to the bedrooms in the back. Damn it. Why was he awake? Had he found out?

He ambled over to the throne, and sat, grinning at me all the while.

“Were you?” I strolled over to him. “I can't think why.”

He put a finger on my lip. “I am glad you are here, though not for the reason you think.”

“Intriguing.” I sat beside him and poured myself a cup of wine. I offered him one, but

## The Author



→ Shauna Lawless is an avid reader of Irish mythology and folklore. As an Irish woman, she loves that Irish mythology has inspired so many stories over the years. However, she wanted to explore the history and mythology of Ireland in a more authentic way. She lives in Northern Ireland with her family. Follow Shauna on Twitter at @shaunaLwrites, or visit shaunalawless.com.

he declined. A large leg of lamb still lay on the table, and I pointed to it. Glunairn gave me a small nod, and I picked up the sharp knife beside it to cut a slice of meat away from the bone.

“I have a marriage proposal for you,” he said.

The succulent cut fell away, and I stabbed it with the tip of the knife then placed it in Glunairn's mouth. A line of pink juice dripped from his lips and into his beard.

I hadn't expected this to be the topic of our conversation. He'd asked me to marry him once, many years ago. A drunken mess, he'd forgotten all about it the next day, and I'd had no intention of reminding him. But what to say now? It might suit me to keep him in my pocket until Sitric had more experience.

Glunairn swallowed. “Torna, uncle to the King of Ulaid, has asked if he can marry you. I've said yes.”

Marriage? To an outsider? I buried my scream. It would be a mistake to give him that reaction. And more likely than not, Glunairn was toying with me.

“Oh, I couldn't marry Torna of Ulaid. I'd miss Sitric too much.”

“Sitric is a man now. He needs a wife. Not a mother.”

I grinned as I raised my eyebrows. “So, you have a marriage in mind for my son too? Who is the lucky girl?”

“Sigrid, daughter of Vidar.”

“Vidar, the fur trader?”

Glunairn nodded. “It is a good match.”



It was a terrible match, so terrible I didn't know how Glunaiarn had kept a straight face when he said it. Vidar was a trader, but a poor one, with one ship to his name and an ageing crew. He knew then. He knew what Sitric had done and wanted me out of the city before he killed him.

I cut another slice of meat. I stabbed it once again with the tip of the knife and, this time, placed the meat in my own mouth. Glunaiarn smiled as I chewed and swallowed.

"What about your needs?" I asked. "I can't believe you'd give me away so easily?"

Glunaiarn laughed. "You are pretty, Gormflaith. I have enjoyed you, but I must make more alliances to prevent the King of Munster raiding our lands. I expect Torna to arrive here tomorrow, and the wedding will take place the day after."

His voice had sharpened, enough for me to know he was being serious. Bastard. He wanted to separate me from my boy. Without me here to protect him, Sitric would be dead by the end of the year, and I wouldn't let that happen.

"Tell me," I said sweetly. "Is this Torna rich?" I cut another chunk of meat and, using the knife, fed it to him. "It won't do, if he can't keep me in the luxury I became accustomed to with your father. Poverty doesn't suit me."

Glunaiarn laughed as he took the meat into his mouth and ground it with his teeth. "You amuse me, Gormflaith. That's why I like you so much. You're as greedy as me."

I set the knife on the table then swept my lips against his neck. "Oh, I think not. I'm much, much greedier."

His right hand slid along my calf, rising slowly until it reached my thigh.

A raucous bout of cheering erupted from outside as his hand brushed the hair between my legs. The men were calling for a fight to start. "Sitric," they called, their shouts demanding that my son enter the square.

I moved my lips from Glunaiarn's neck to his lips, kissing him over and over. His free hand reached to tug my scarf away from my neck and unfasten my pinafore. I pushed it away, placing it on my other leg, while I loosened the scarf for him.

He nodded, understanding what I wanted, and watched me until the fabric came free. I clambered over the seat, spreading my legs so I could sit on his lap. His eyes closed as our lips met.

Taking a deep breath, I rolled the freed scarf into a ball and silently picked up the meat knife with my right hand.

He panted, waiting, anticipating. Eyes still closed.

I lunged forward and thrust the blade through his neck. Then I pierced his eye. Then his throat. With my left hand, I held the scarf over his mouth. Stabbing over and over. I pressed my body against his, using the thick wool to dampen the sounds of his screams, until there was nothing but silence.

"What have you done?"

I spun around.

Stumbling towards me was Egil, his sleepy eyes widening as he stared at the bloodied corpse of his uncle. "You fucking bitch."

He staggered toward the doors of the hall,

tumbling over his own feet. I held my hand out. The dying firepit suddenly burned hot, and a fire-bolt shot out from the coals to collide with his face. Disorientated, he fell onto his hands and knees.

Yanking Glunaiarn's sword from its sheath, I ran, and thrust it into Egil's side, twisting upward. He thudded to the ground, blood pouring from his wound and mouth. Life seeped away from him before he even understood what had happened.

"I'm sorry, Egil," I whispered, shakily pressing the bloodied meat knife into his hand. "But if you want something, you must take it before somebody else does."

His body slumped forward, relaxing like a sail with no wind. I was glad the knife did not slide from his hand. His father would greet him in Valhalla now, for Amlav had always been fond of Ragnall's bastard children, and Egil, out of them all, had been his favourite.

I stepped back and pressed my hand against my chest. What had I done? The king was dead. So was his half-brother. But I had saved my son.

"Dada," a sleepy voice called out from the bedrooms behind the hall.

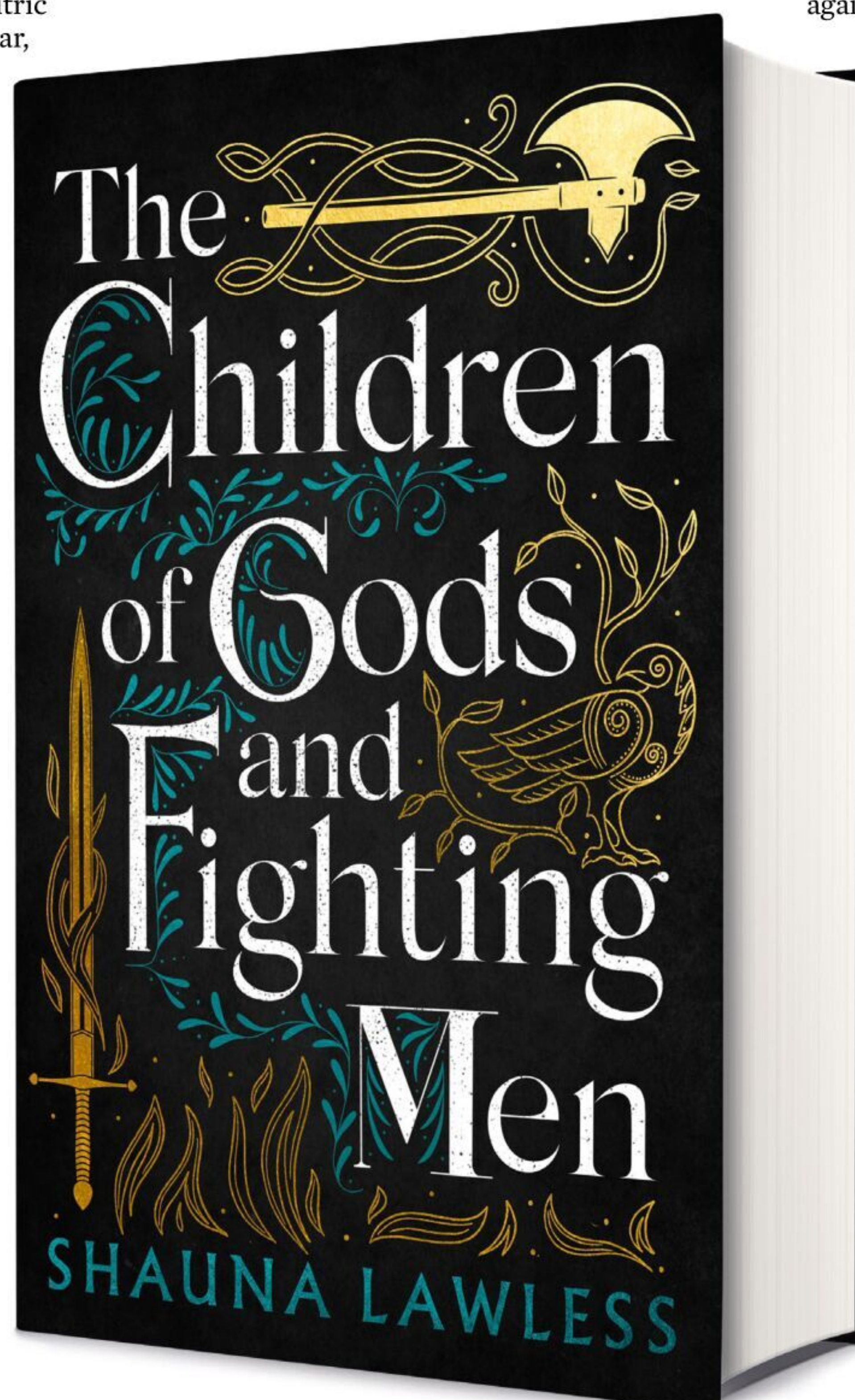
Quickly, I examined the dead bodies. A fight had broken out between them... Yes... Egil was angry and jealous... Glunaiarn, rash and hot-tempered. There was no one else around to say otherwise. And Sitric had been fighting outside for hours. Not even a fool would think of blaming him.

Throwing my blood-soaked scarf and pinafore into the fireplace, I watched them catch fire as I fastened my cloak and ran towards the doors. "Dada," the voice called out again, this time louder.

As I slipped outside, another cheer broke out. The men were calling Sitric's name. My son had won his fight. And now, his life was his own once more. No more knives in the back to worry about.

Smiling, I crept down the great hall steps and made my way home.

*Discover what's next for Gormflaith in The Children Of Gods And Fighting Men. Ebook and UK hardback out now, US hardback out 1 November.*





## DARK CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS

A multiversal mess

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Joshua Williamson**

► Artist **Daniel Sampere**

**ISSUES 1-3** The original *Crisis On Infinite Earths* event may have been groundbreaking in its day, but DC has now blown up its multiple universes so often that any new crossover saga needs something special to stand out from the crowd. Sadly, it seems nobody told the creative team behind *Dark Crisis On Infinite Earths*, which feels overfamiliar to a staggering degree.

The basic set-up is that the Justice League are presumed dead in a big multiversal bust-up (part of a story that's been running in various titles since 2021's *Infinite Frontier* miniseries, and links all the way back to the original *Crisis*). As a result, younger "legacy" heroes like Kal-El's son Jonathan Kent and new Batman Jace Fox are having to step up to fill their predecessors' shoes.

They're soon facing an army of villains who are out to exploit the League's absence – but that's just a harbinger of a much larger threat, one that could potentially wipe out the entire multiverse.

There's the potential here for a thrilling romp, with young, inexperienced heroes having to team up and fight together against an unstoppable foe. What we get instead is an uninspired cover version of better and more interesting event comics, and a story that barely even bothers clearly establishing the narrative's emotional stakes before it starts throwing in as many random superhero fights as it can get away with.

It's always possible that writer Joshua Williamson might be holding all his really impressive stuff back for the latter half of this seven-issue miniseries, but the first three issues make that seem unlikely. This is a melodramatic muddle of storytelling, lacking the energy and invention that can make event comics a genuine pleasure. The dialogue is functional and the characterisation scenes lack sparkle, while the story requires an absurdly in-depth knowledge of DC continuity to follow what's going on.

In terms of action, the series

“Requires an absurdly in-depth knowledge of DC continuity”

struggles into “just above average” territory with a couple of half-decent set-pieces (including an assault on Titans Tower). However, while strong, attention-grabbing visuals would have helped counter some of the script's many flaws, Daniel Sampere's art instead settles for a workmanlike slickness that's flashy but unremarkable.

At some point, DC is hopefully going to realise that constantly regurgitating what *Crisis On Infinite Earths* did back in 1986 can't work forever. Until then, it seems it's going to keep playing the old hits, serving up lukewarm leftovers like this and hoping we don't notice how uninspired and repetitive it's getting. **Saxon Bullock**

**i** *Dark Crisis's* main adversary, the Great Darkness, was created by Alan Moore during his '80s run on *Swamp Thing*.



## STARHENG

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Image Comics**

► Writer **Liam Sharp**

► Artist **Liam Sharp, Matylda McCormack-Sharp**

**ISSUES 1-3** Criss-crossing the centuries and combining cosmic sci-fi with Arthurian mythology, Liam Sharp's inaugural creator-owned series as a writer/artist certainly doesn't lack ambition.

Amusingly dubbing the main villains as “*The Terminator* as directed by Tim Burton”, “*The Dragon And The Boar*” – the opening six-parter in a multi-book saga – centres on a futuristic Merlin, who journeys back to fifth century Britain to stop time-travelling killer droids from destroying all magic.

Throwing in references to the origins of Stonehenge, the Green Man and Alfred Bester, it's compellingly heady stuff, although the decision to mostly eschew dialogue in favour of sometimes exposition-heavy narration slows the pace. It also distances us from modern-day protagonist Amber Weaver, who – as we learn in a sequence illustrated in an endearingly cartoony style by Liam's daughter Matylda McCormack-Sharp – lost her parents in archetypally spooky circumstances.

The precise role that Amber and her boyfriend Daryl play in the overall scheme of things is unclear, although there are hints in issue three's startling climax that the plot is starting to come together. Sharp's spectacular art is the main draw, so you can always enjoy the pictures while pondering the story. **Stephen Jewell**







## BATMAN – ONE BAD DAY: THE RIDDLER

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher DC Black Label

► Writer Tom King

► Artist Mitch Gerads

**SPECIAL** DC's latest Black Label release should satisfy anyone who thought that the Riddler in Matt Reeves's *The Batman* just wasn't quite dark enough... Inspired by iconic classic *The Killing Joke*, *One Bad Day* is a series of self-contained 64-page specials that each focus on a different Batman villain. This first instalment gives us a deeply disturbing glimpse into the psyche of Edward Nygma.

The story begins with the Riddler committing a random, apparently motiveless murder of a Gotham civilian, and then surrendering to the police. Batman immediately tries to uncover the reason behind this killing, but as he starts investigating Nygma's past, the Riddler is already wreaking havoc from inside his jail cell.

The resulting thriller builds a clammy sense of tension and dread while also pulling off some grisly and violent shocks. Writer Tom King and artist Mitch Gerads deliver the same sense of control and craft that they've previously shown in *Mister Miracle* and *Strange Adventures*, with Gerads creating a series of grimy, atmospheric visuals that heighten the story's horror.

While the level of bleakness here won't be for everyone, this first instalment of *One Bad Day* is an impressively nasty and compelling tale. **Saxon Bullock**

SFX Loves  
★★★★★



## FANTASTIC FOUR: FULL CIRCLE

In the Zone

★★★★★

► RELEASED 15 SEPTEMBER

► Publisher Abrams ComicArts

► Writer/artist Alex Ross

**GRAPHIC NOVEL** It's fitting that the

Fantastic Four's origin story frames them as pioneers: their fateful rocket ride aims to conquer space before the Commies, but also opens the limitless frontier of an entire comic book universe.

This new graphic novel by Alex Ross – the first in a line from Marvel and Abrams ComicArts – returns the founding family of the MCU to first principles. Riffing on plot threads from the classic '60s Lee and Kirby run but unbound by modern continuity, it finds the FF in deep exploration mode, voyaging into the counter-dimensional weirdness of the Negative Zone. Sample scientific finding: "There's a whole universe of stuff here that wants to kill us!"

Ross made his name with the painterly photorealism of *Marvels*, but this is another experience entirely. Propelled by

astoundingly dynamic page design, all splintered panels and kinetic angles, the style is closer to psychedelic pop art. Breathtaking use of dayglo colour makes this multiversal trip authentically trippy without losing the essential chunky nobility of the classic character designs. "It's like I'm inna head shop!" growls the Thing.

Ross even delivers a riff on Kirby's trademark photo collages, those experimental pages that sought to capture the reality of cosmic travel. But he also finds the everyday humanity in Benjamin J Grimm's rock-like mug.

Beyond the head-rush of the visuals there's an intriguingly existential take on the Negative Zone itself. "You're over the hill," its demons whisper. "Your work isn't what it used to be." If Ross is channelling his own artistic anxieties he has nothing to worry about on that score. It's slobberin' time! **Nick Setchfield**

**i** Discovered by Reed Richards, the Negative Zone first appeared in *Fantastic Four* 51, cover-dated June 1966.



## BATMAN: ONE DARK KNIGHT

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

(Collected edition out 20 September)

► Publisher DC Black Label

► Writer/artist Jock

**ISSUES 1-3** Imagine a Batman movie directed by an *Escape From New York*-era John Carpenter, and you'll have a pretty good idea of the gritty urban thrill-ride that *Batman: One Dark Knight* has in store for you.

This tightly constructed, joyfully simple tale sees Batman supervising the prisoner transfer of an electromagnetically-powered criminal, until things go wrong in a major way. Suddenly, all communication and electricity in Gotham is blacked out by a massive electromagnetic pulse, and Batman is left to fight for survival against multiple gangs of bloodthirsty thugs in order to get the prisoner to safety.

Writer/artist Jock proves here multiple times why his take on Batman is so iconic, and utilises the scale of the oversized "Prestige Format" pages to render some truly spectacular artwork. The action sequences are vivid, kinetic and fiercely intense, captured in imaginative layouts that mix brooding shadows with blazing bursts of colour.

Along with these stunning visuals, Jock also delivers a satisfying story, which has enough narrative curve-balls to keep the pace up and the tension high.

The result is an unpretentious and hugely enjoyable pulp action-fest.

**Saxon Bullock**

SFX Loves  
★★★★★



## MULTIVERSUS

That's brawl, folks!

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also available on PlayStation 4, Xbox Series S/X, Xbox One, PC

► Publisher Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment

**VIDEOGAME** With the exception of *Super Smash Bros*, mascot crossovers rarely deliver on the promise of their shiny line-ups, usually feeling more like quick cash-ins. For once, however, the likes of Batman, Shaggy (the *Scooby-Doo* character rather than the '90s singer, sadly) and Arya Stark are giving Mario a run for his coins with this extremely polished, free-to-play party fighter.

Though it's still a bit of a cash-in, mind. It's a live service title, like *Fortnite* or *Star Wars: Galaxy Of Heroes*, and you can hop in for free, but you'll find a variety of microtransactions to spice up

the rotating roster of free fighters. Spend the game's various currencies and you can unlock fighters permanently, or splash out on skins and emotes. If you're a collector, watch your wallet, as the game is happy to try to sell you heaps of digital tat.

Such caveats aside, when you actually hop into a match you'll be hard-pressed not to smile if you're a fan of any of the franchises represented. The character designs look great together, with a unified style skewing even live-action characters into the cartoon realm, meaning LeBron James looks great squaring up to Jake The Dog and Finn The Human, or even Tom and Jerry.

Meanwhile, heaps of contextual voice lines mean you'll have Kevin Conroy's Batman and Matthew Lillard's Shaggy bantering as soon as a match begins. Across 1v1, 2v2 and free-for-all modes

(multiplayer, or with bots), your goal is to build up enough damage on each character to be able to smack them progressively further off the themed stages to score a point.

Every character is easy to pick up and play, as they all share a simple control scheme of jumps, dodges, and normal and special attacks. But there's a depth to mastery, as all have their intricacies and different utilities that reference their origins. Velma, for instance, is less direct, able to find clues to eventually call the cops to do the damage for her, whereas Wonder Woman can use her shield to negate damage before doing an area-wide gauntlet burst. In team modes, these come into their own, as some interactions can benefit allies (like Bugs Bunny's damage-avoiding wabbit tunnel).

It's flashy, clicky, fun chaos that caters to fandoms far and wide – as long as you can stand the allure of digital currencies.

**Oscar Taylor-Kent**

**i** The planet of the game's OC mascot Reindog was destroyed by *The Nothing*, connecting it to *The NeverEnding Story*.



## THE OMEN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 23 SEPTEMBER**

35 minutes | Vinyl

► Label Varèse Sarabande

**SOUNDTRACK** If you're keen to persuade your neighbours that you're a practising Satanist (well, it prevents them asking to borrow the lawnmower), the score for Richard Donner's 1976 Antichrist shocker is a must-have. It features all the blasphemous chanting a Black Mass could need.

Jerry Goldsmith's Oscar-winning soundtrack has been reissued several times, with a 40th anniversary CD expanding the track listing to 26 cues. This latest edition (on splattery red vinyl, should you care for such mortal vanity) reverts to the 12 of the original release.

Tracks like "Ave Satani", "The Killer Storm" and "The Dogs Attack" make stirring use of increasingly strident choral voices singing phrases like "Sanguis bibimus, corpus edimus" and "Ave Satani!" ("We drink the blood, we eat the flesh"/"Hail Satan!"), along with pounded kettle drums, passages of atonal strings, and propulsive rhythms not a million miles from John Williams's work on *Jaws*. Latin scholars may tut at the conjugations. And it's not exactly subtle... But hey, this is *The Omen* we're talking about.

The one jarring outlier is "The Piper Dreams", a song based on Goldsmith's love theme (performed by his wife Carol), with pass-the-sickbag lyrics about "gentle waves and silver days, and love that fills the air". Be sure to whip the needle off sharpish, or next door will rumble the ruse.

**Ian Berriman**



Tom and/or Jerry could easily kick Supe's arse.



## XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3



War... what is it good for?

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Format Nintendo Switch

► Publisher Nintendo

**VIDEOGAME** The nations of Keves and Agnus have always been locked in war, fighting to survive. Each battalion “colony” is presided over by a Flame Clock that sustains the lives of its soldiers for their 10-year lifespan. They’re grown in pods at an accelerated rate before dying in

“Sidequests are meaningful both narratively and mechanically”

battle, turning into a kind of dust, and beginning all over again. It’s bleak, but *Xenoblade Chronicles 3* isn’t interested in wallowing only in that, focusing instead on a group from each side who end up having to come together, in turn realising that – you guessed it – they aren’t so different after all.

As the cast of characters try to get to the bottom of who’s actually benefiting from the forever war, they stumble through little stories arising from the devastation. Technically finishable in 50-60 hours, this is the kind of RPG that’ll make you want to double that; sidequests along the way are meaningful both narratively and mechanically, as they often unlock traversal tools or classes.



The best scene from *When LARPing Goes Bad Vol 3*.

While the Switch can’t compete with its powerhouse rival consoles, the game’s visual design more than makes up for it, with expansive maps really feeling like they’re yours to poke around in and discover. The real-time combat can get a bit mashy, but there’s depth in its cross-classing options (offering the kind of RPG innovation that used to be *Final Fantasy*’s bread and butter).

The gameplay, however, can’t live up to the ambitious story, which in typical JRPG style frequently has to lean on well-crafted though lengthy cutscenes for its big moments. Still, this is the most exciting the genre has felt in years.

**Oscar Taylor-Kent**

**i** Our heroes are flute-playing “Off-Seers” that lay the dead to rest. Replicas of the flutes were made during development.

## DOCTOR WHO: TENTH DOCTOR/ CLASSIC COMPANIONS

The Clause Of Axos

★★★★★

► **RELEASED SEPTEMBER**

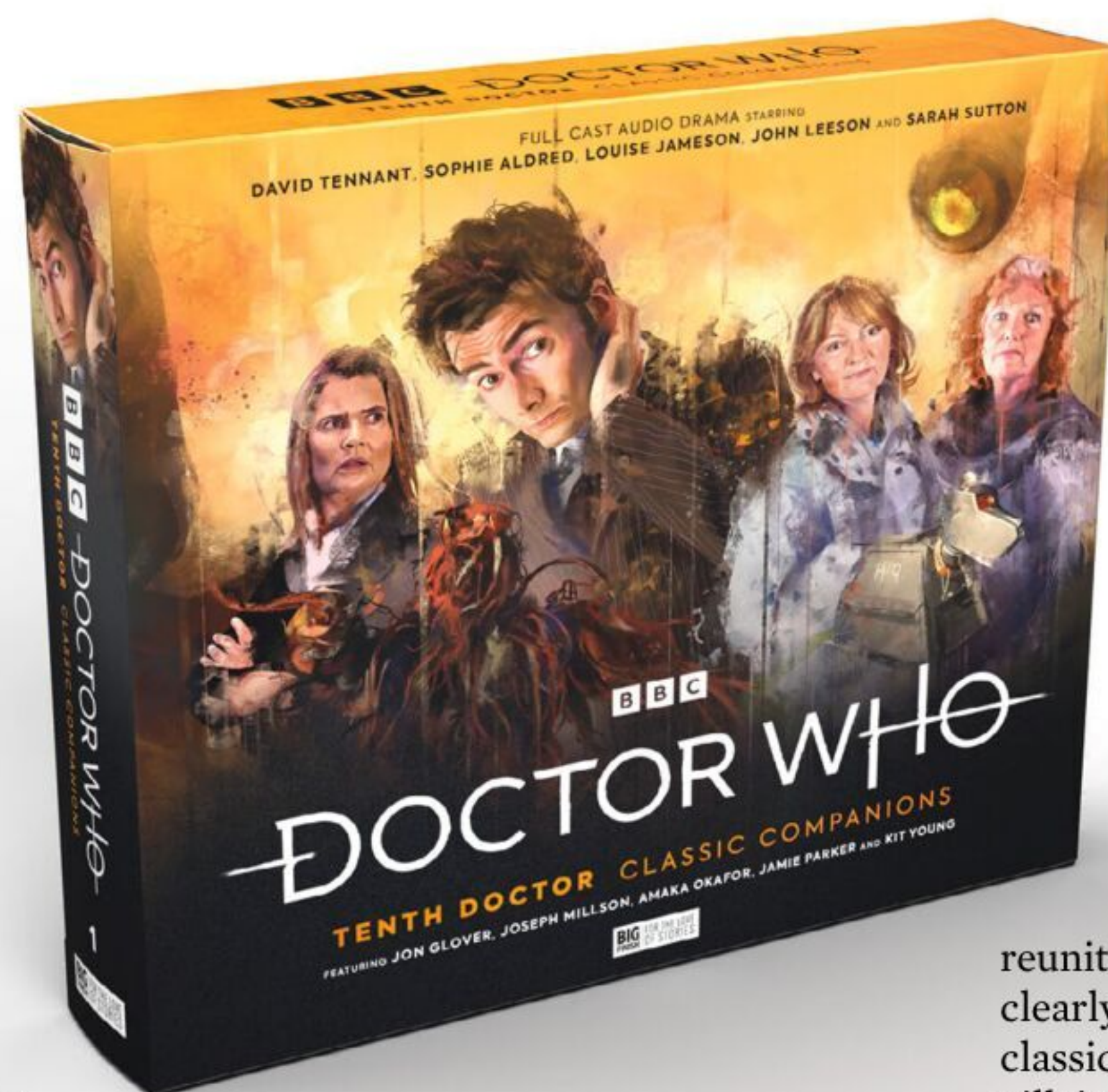
180 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

**AUDIO DRAMA** One of the joys of *Doctor Who* is its ability to canonically indulge in “What ifs” that elsewhere would be the realm of fan fiction. This box set takes on one used to such great effect in the TV series – what if the Tenth Doctor met a companion of his

younger selves – and plays with it a little more.

In “Splinters”, the Doctor finds K-9 floating in space, waiting for the Doctor’s assistance to chase down temporal anomalies caused by the Time War. They find themselves in Cornwall, where Leela is aiding a village under siege from the monstrous Spriggan, who steals away children on their 18th



birthday. But just how is Leela on Earth? The answer makes for a fun pairing and an intriguing tale.

Second up is “The Stuntman”, mostly set inside a virtual world in which the Doctor attempts to aid stuntwoman “Kasey-Ann Frost” (a fun anagram) and her protective father. It’s a story that shifts

between reality and virtual scenarios in a way that just hasn’t been well realised, and while it’s always nice to hear Sarah Sutton, it would have been nicer to have more of the real Nyssa.

“Quantum Of Axos”, by contrast, is a traditional story that shows off just what *Who* does best. Ace – now going by Dorothy – is in Cambridge investigating a tech company when Ten and K-9 turn up to help.

It’s wonderful to be reunited with a more mature but clearly recognisable Ace, in a classic set-up (with classic villains) that includes some interesting commentary on the dangers of nostalgia. Head and shoulders above the first two, this is a compelling, entertaining tale which should delight fans.

**Rhian Drinkwater**

**i** A “spriggan” is a creature from Cornish myth that delighted in evil mischief and often swapped children for changelings.



# TOYS

As killer doll Chucky makes a return, we test your knowledge of children's playthings, both malevolent and benign

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

## QUESTION 1

In *Ted*, who voiced the titular talking teddy bear?

## QUESTION 2

In *Ant-Man*, which well-known children's character features in the train-set battle between the hero and Yellowjacket?

## QUESTION 3

Who is the arch-enemy of Buzz Lightyear?

## QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this sinister doll.

## QUESTION 5

What's the real name of Superman villain Toyman? (NB: we want the original version of the character.)

## QUESTION 6

Complete the title of this animated series: *My Little Pony: \_\_\_\_\_* Is Magic.

## QUESTION 7

In the Transformers toy range, what is Soundwave's alternate form?

## QUESTION 8 Picture Question

What's this doll called, and which TV series did it appear in?

## QUESTION 9

"Then, from outer space, a Spotty Man brought him to life with his cosmic dust..." Who is being described here?

## QUESTION 10

Who directed *Small Soldiers*, the 1998 film in which toys turn sentient after being fitted with an advanced microprocessor?

## QUESTION 11

In *Bagpuss*, what is the name of the rag doll?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

## QUESTION 12 Picture Question

In which film would you find a bunch of deadly dolls like this?

## QUESTION 13

In *The Lost Boys*, what toys do the Frog brothers arm up with as potential vampire-fighting weapons?

## QUESTION 14

What unusual weapon does John Steed make use of during a toy department scene in 1965 *The Avengers* episode "Death At Bargain Prices"?

## QUESTION 15

Name the Topps trading card series which featured gruesome parodies of the Cabbage Patch Kids, such as Valerie Vomit, Icky Vicky and Scabby Abby.

## QUESTION 16 Picture Question

In which horror film would you find this creepy doll?

## QUESTION 17

In *Dude, Where's My Car?*, what toy is the Continuum Transfunctioner – an alien device capable of destroying the universe – initially disguised as?

## QUESTION 18

Name the carpenter who was the creator of puppet-boy Pinocchio.

## QUESTION 19

Which *Star Trek* character had a teddy bear named Kukalaka?

## QUESTION 20

Name the *Doctor Who* episode in which Amy and Rory become trapped in a doll's house.

**Answers**  
1 Seth MacFarlane 2 Thomas The Tank Engine 3 Emperor Zurg 4 Annabelle 5 Winslow Schott 6 Friendship 7 A cassette recorder 8 Talky Tina, The Twilight Zone 9 SuperTed 10 Joe Dante 11 Madeleine 12 Barbie 13 Water pistols filled with holy water 14 A ping-pong ball gun 15 The Garbage Pail Kids 16 Poltergeist 17 A Rubik's Cube 18 Mr Geppetto 19 Julian Bashir 20 "Night Terrors"

## How did you do?

What toy are you?

0-5

Single marble

6-10

Hoop and stick

11-15

Slinky

16-19

Dinky diecast

20

Scalextric set



NEXT ISSUE

# IN THE NEXT ISSUE

SFX 358  
ON SALE  
5 OCT

**The Devil's Hour**  
Peter Capaldi isn't playing nice

**The Walking Dead**  
The final chapter is here

**Interview With  
The Vampire**  
Anne Rice's novel revisited

PLUS!  
**Doctor Who**  
No, really this time

**Black Adam**  
DC's anti-hero has arrived

HE'S COMING HOME (AGAIN)

# HALLOWEEN ENDS

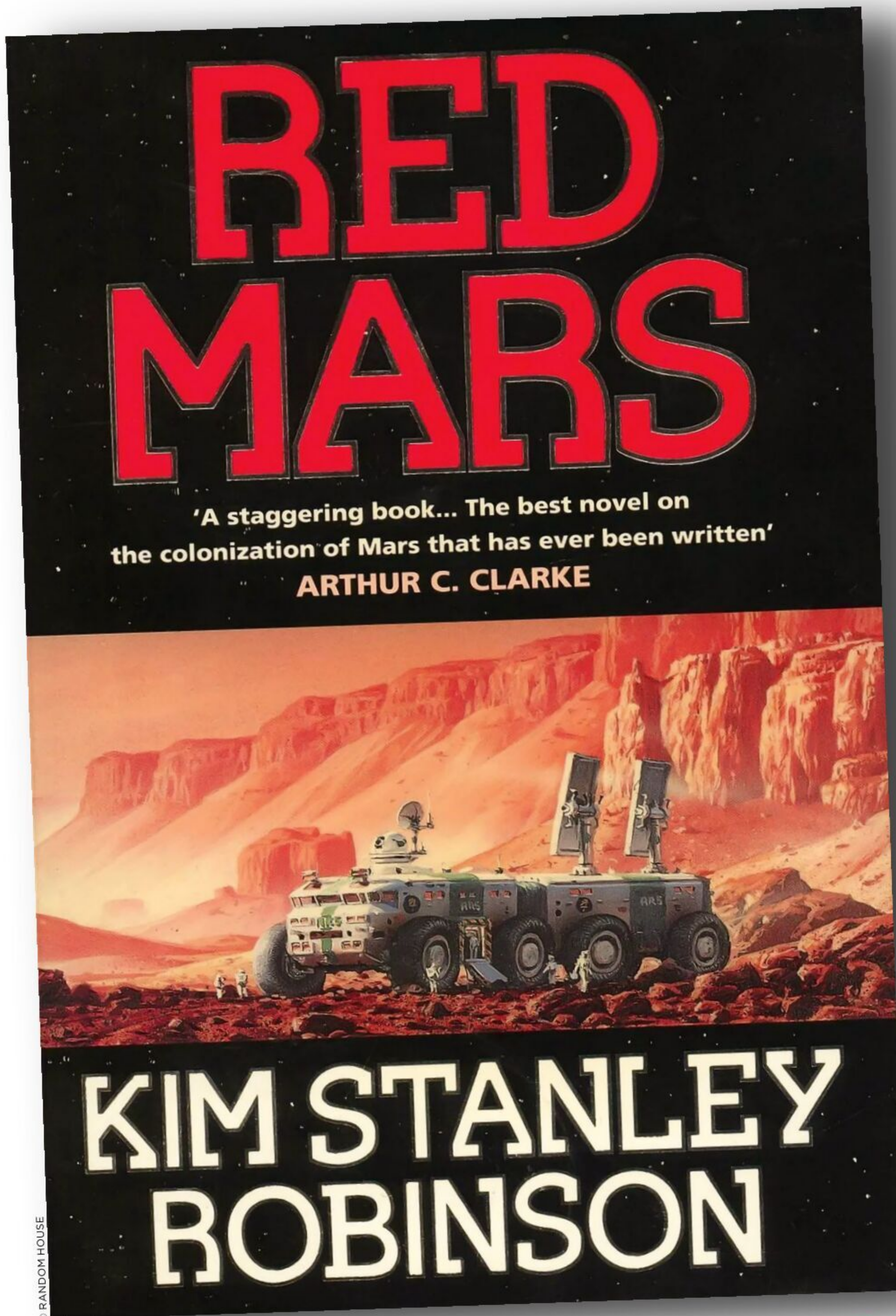
Michael Myers heads up the annual *SFX* Halloween Horror Issue!

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ALL CONTENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE, AND ENTITLED TO ONE GOOD SCARE



## RED MARS



### Jonathan Wright, freelance writer



Not every book you grow to love connects immediately. When I first picked up Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* – published 30 years ago this month – I was searching for distraction, a science fiction novel packed with adventure, vast vistas and jeopardy. A space battle or two wouldn't have gone amiss either.

Within a few pages it was obvious the opening volume in Robinson's Mars trilogy, which begins aboard the spaceship Ares in 2026, wasn't *that* kind of science fiction novel. Instead, here was a book that – focusing largely on the First Hundred, the men and women who land on Mars prior to terraforming the planet – was a far more serious social SF novel than anything I wanted to read then.

This kind of thing happened a lot to me back in the '90s. Drinking too much, I was a lost soul. Serious fiction was simply too difficult because one of the things about being a certain kind of committed boozier is that it turns your attention obsessively inwards, but this process reveals nothing more than self-loathing.

I certainly didn't want to read about people dealing with the existential questions that come with making a whole new world – or, more accurately, remaking an ancient world – because I knew I would be wholly unequal to such questions, let alone heading to Mars on a one-way trip as the First Hundred do. Hell, I was unequal to the idea of walking past a bar.

So what changed? For the sake of this narrative, it would be helpful if a moment of epiphany came when reading *Red Mars* and I got sober, but life is rarely that simple. In truth, I can't quite remember when I reattempted reading *Red Mars*, but what I can recall clearly is that when I picked up the book again, something had changed.

Tired of isolating, I was at the very least ready to stop drinking, a necessary first step to swearing off booze. I wanted to connect with life again in all its messy glory, and the thing about the Mars trilogy, and Kim Stanley Robinson's work more generally, is that it's filled with connections. Convoluted interpersonal relationships, internal monologues where characters link ideas formulated in different centuries and, most of all, people talking to each other about important things, grappling with *how best to live*.

Turns out they were talking about things I needed to hear. ●

*Jonathan can now walk past bars. Secondhand record shops are another matter.*

### Fact Attack!

→ *Red Mars* was followed by *Green Mars* (1993), *Blue Mars* (1996) and short story collection *The Martians* (1999).

→ Robinson decided to write about terraforming Mars years before, writing 1984 short story "Green Mars" to "claim to the title".

→ Robinson took inspiration from backpacking trips in the Sierra Mountains, taking notes about what he saw there for *Blue Mars*.

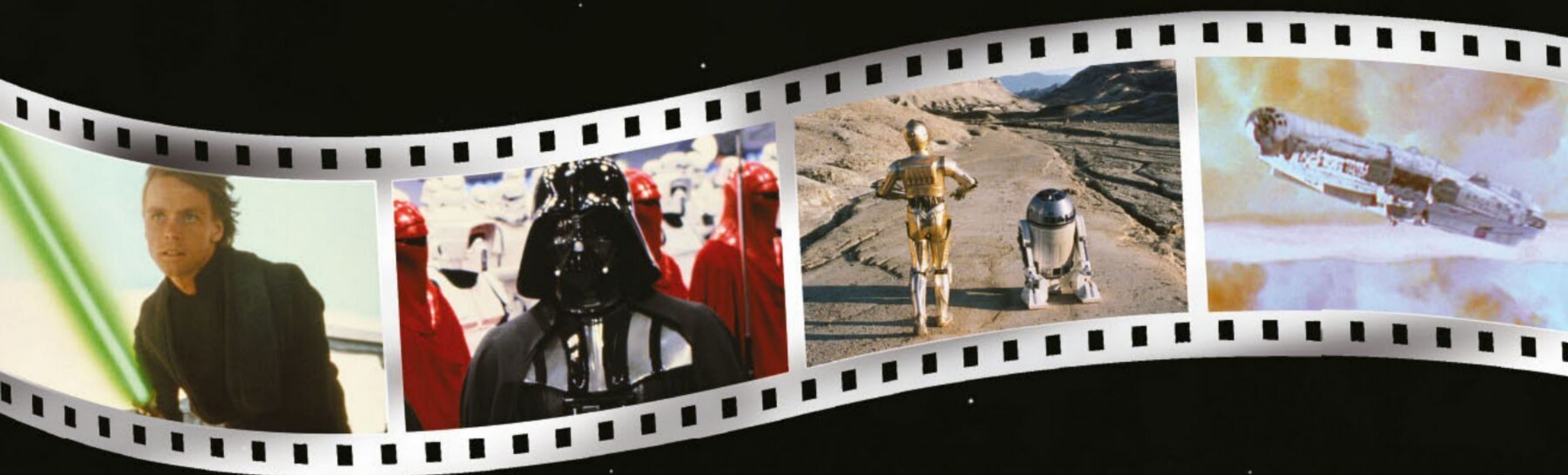
→ A *Red Mars* TV series, to be written by *Babylon 5*'s J Michael Straczynski, was greenlit by Spike TV in 2015, but came to nothing.

→ The text of *Green Mars* was included on a DVD called *Visions Of Mars* which was sent to Mars with NASA's Phoenix lander in 2008.



# STAR WARS™

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